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STAGE - LAND

AND

ON THE STAGE—AND OFF

BY JEROME K. JEROME

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43. THREE MEN IN A BOAT, I vol.

STAGE-LAND
AND
ON THE STAGE—AND OFF

BY
JEROME K. JEROME

AUTHOR OF
*'IDLE THOUGHTS OF AN IDLE FELLOW,' 'THREE MEN IN A BOAT,'
ETC.*

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TO
THAT HIGHLY RESPECTABLE
BUT UNNECESSARILY RETIRING
INDIVIDUAL,
OF WHOM
WE HEAR SO MUCH
BUT
SEE SO LITTLE
'THE EARNEST STUDENT OF THE DRAMA,'
THIS
(COMPARATIVELY) TRUTHFUL LITTLE BOOK
IS LOVINGLY
DEDICATED

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STAGE-LAND

THE HERO

HIS name is George, generally speaking: "Call me George!" he says to the heroine. She calls him George (in a very low voice, because she is so young and timid). Then he is happy.

The Stage hero never has any work to do. He is always hanging about, and getting into trouble. His chief aim in life is to be accused of crimes he has never committed, and if he can muddle things up with a corpse, in some complicated way, so as to get himself reasonably mistaken for the murderer, he feels his day has not been wasted.

He has a wonderful gift of speech, and a flow of language, calculated to strike terror to the bravest heart. It is a grand thing to hear him bullyragging the villain.

The Stage hero is always entitled to "estates," chiefly remarkable for their high state of cultivation and for the eccentric ground plan of the "Manor House" upon them. The house is never more than one storey high, but it makes up in green stuff over the porch what it lacks in size and convenience.

The chief drawback in connection with it, to our eyes, is that all the inhabitants of the neighbouring village appear to live in the front garden, but the hero evidently thinks it rather nice of them, as it enables him to make speeches to them from the front door-step—his favourite recreation.

There is generally a public-house immediately opposite. This is handy.

These "estates" are a great anxiety to the Stage hero. He is not what you would call a business man, as far as we can judge, and his attempts to manage his own property invariably land him in ruin and distraction. His "estates," however, always get taken away from him by the villain, before the first act is over, and this saves him all further trouble with regard to them, until the end of the play, when he gets saddled with them once more.

Not but what it must be confessed that there is much excuse for the poor fellow's general bewilderment concerning his affairs ; and for his legal errors and confusions generally. Stage "law" may not be quite the most fearful and wonderful mystery in the whole universe, but it's near it—very near it. We were under the impression, at one time, that we ourselves knew something—just a little—about statutory and common law, but, after paying attention to the legal points of one or two plays, we found that we were mere children at it.

We thought we would not be beaten, and we determined to get to the bottom of Stage law, and to understand it ; but, after some six months' effort, our brain (a singularly fine one) began to soften, and we abandoned the study, believing it would come cheaper, in the end, to offer a suitable reward, of about fifty or sixty thousand pounds, say, to any one who would explain it to us.

The reward has remained unclaimed to the present day, and is still open.

One gentleman did come to our assistance a little while ago, but his explanations only made

the matter more confusing to our mind than it was before. He was surprised at what he called our density, and said the thing was all clear and simple to him. But we discovered afterwards that he was an escaped lunatic.

The only points of Stage "law" on which we are at all clear are as follows:—

That if a man dies without leaving a will, then all his property goes to the nearest villain.

But that if a man dies and leaves a will, then all his property goes to whoever can get possession of that will.

That the accidental loss of the three and six-penny copy of a marriage certificate annuls the marriage.

That the evidence of one prejudiced witness, of shady antecedents, is quite sufficient to convict the most stainless and irreproachable gentleman of crimes for the committal of which he could have had no possible motive.

But that this evidence may be rebutted, years afterwards, and the conviction quashed without further trial by the unsupported statement of the comic man.

That if A. forges B.'s name to a cheque, then

the law of the land is that B. shall be sentenced to ten years' penal servitude.

That ten minutes' notice is all that is required to foreclose a mortgage.

That all trials of criminal cases take place in the front parlour of the victim's house, the villain acting as counsel, judge, and jury rolled into one, and a couple of policemen being told off to follow his instructions.

These are a few of the more salient features of Stage "law" so far as we have been able to grasp it up to the present ; but, as fresh acts and clauses and modifications appear to be introduced for each new play, we have abandoned all hope of ever being able to really comprehend the subject.

To return to our hero, the state of the law, as above sketched, naturally confuses him, and the villain, who is the only human being who does seem to understand Stage legal questions, is easily able to fleece and ruin him. The simple-minded hero signs mortgages and bills of sale, and deeds of gift and such like things, under the impression that he is playing some sort of a round game ; and then, when he cannot pay the interest, they

take his wife and children away from him, and turn him adrift into the world.

Being thrown upon his own resources, he naturally starves.

He can make long speeches, he can tell you all his troubles, he can stand in the limelight and strike attitudes, he can knock the villain down, and he can defy the police, but these requirements are not much in demand in the labour market, and, as they are all he can do or cares to do, he finds earning his living a much more difficult affair than he fancied.

There is a deal too much hard work about it for him. He soon gives up trying it at all, and prefers to eke out an uncertain existence by sponging upon good-natured old Irish women, and generous but weak-minded young artisans who have left their native village to follow him, and enjoy the advantage of his company and conversation.

And so he drags out his life, during the middle of the piece, raving at Fortune, raging at Humanity, and whining about his miseries until the last act.

Then he gets back those "estates" of his into

his possession once again, and can go back to the village, and make more moral speeches, and be happy.

Moral speeches are, undoubtedly, his leading article, and of these, it must be owned, he has an inexhaustible stock. He is as chock-full of noble sentiments as a bladder is of wind. They are weak and watery sentiments of the sixpenny tea-meeting order. We have a dim notion that we have heard them before. The sound of them always conjures up to our mind the vision of a dull long room, full of oppressive silence, broken only by the scratching of steel pens, and an occasional whispered: "Give us a suck, Bill. You know I always liked you"; or a louder: "Please, sir, speak to Jimmy Boggles. He's a jogging my elbow."

The Stage hero, however, evidently regards these meanderings as gems of brilliant thought, fresh from the philosophic mine.

The gallery greet them with enthusiastic approval. They are a warm-hearted people, gallery-ites, and they like to give a hearty welcome to old friends.

And then, too, the sentiments are so good, and

a British gallery is so moral. We doubt if there could be discovered on this earth any body of human beings one half so moral—so fond of goodness, even when it is slow and stupid—so hateful of meanness in word or deed—as a modern theatrical gallery.

The early Christian martyrs were sinful and worldly, compared with an Adelphi Gallery.

The Stage hero is a very powerful man. You wouldn't think it, to look at him, but you wait till the heroine cries, "Help! Oh George, save me!" or the police attempt to run him in. Then two villains, three extra hired ruffians, and four detectives, are about his fighting weight.

If he knocks down less than three men with one blow, he fears that he must be ill, and wonders "Why this strange weakness."

The hero has his own way of making love. He always does it from behind. The girl turns away from him, when he begins (she being, as we have said, shy and timid), and he takes hold of her hands, and breathes his attachment down her back.

The Stage hero always wears patent leather boots, and they are always spotlessly clean.

Sometimes he is rich, and lives in a room with seven doors to it, and at other times he is starving in a garret ; but in either event, he still wears brand-new patent leather boots.

He might raise at least three and sixpence on those boots, and, when the baby is crying for food, it occurs to us that it would be better if, instead of praying to Heaven, he took off those boots and pawned them ; but this does not seem to occur to him.

He crosses the African desert in patent leather boots, does the Stage hero. He takes a supply with him, when he is wrecked on an uninhabited island. He arrives from long and trying journeys: his clothes are ragged and torn ; but his boots are new and shiny. He puts on patent leather boots to tramp through the Australian bush, to fight in Egypt, to discover the North Pole.

Sometimes he is a gold digger, sometimes a dock labourer, sometimes a soldier, sometimes a sailor, but, whatever he is, he wears patent leather boots.

He goes boating in patent leather boots, he plays cricket in them ; he goes fishing and shooting in them. He will go to Heaven in patent leather boots, or he will decline the invitation.

The Stage hero never talks in a simple, straightforward way, like a mere ordinary mortal.

"You will write to me when you are away, dear, won't you?" says the heroine.

A mere human being would reply :

"Why, of course I shall, ducky, every day."

But the Stage hero is a superior creature. He says :

"Dost see yonder star, Sweet?"

She looks up, and owns that she does see yonder star; and then off he starts and drivels on about that star for full five minutes, and says he will cease to write to her when that pale star has fallen from its place amidst the firmament of Heaven.

The result of a long course of acquaintanceship with Stage heroes has been, so far as we are concerned, to create a yearning for a new kind of Stage hero. What we would like, for a change, would be a man who wouldn't cackle and brag quite so much, but who was capable of taking care of himself for a day, without getting into trouble.

THE VILLAIN

HE wears a clean collar, and smokes a cigarette ; that is how we know he is a villain. In real life, it is often difficult to tell a villain from an honest man, and this gives rise to mistakes : but, on the stage, as we have said, villains wear clean collars and smoke cigarettes, and thus all fear of blunder is avoided.

It is well that the rule does not hold off the stage, or good men might be misjudged. We ourselves, for instance, wear a clean collar—sometimes.

It might be very awkward for our family, especially on Sundays.

He has no power of repartee, has the Stage villain. All the good people in the play say rude and insulting things to him, and smack at him, and score off him, all through the act, but he can never answer them back—can never think of anything clever to say in return.

"Ha, ha, wait till Monday week," is the most brilliant retort that he can make, and he has to get into a corner by himself to think of even that.

The Stage villain's career is always very easy and prosperous up to within a minute of the end of each act. Then he gets suddenly let in, generally by the comic man. It always happens so. Yet the villain is always intensely surprised each time. He never seems to learn anything from experience.

A few years ago the villain used to be blessed with a hopeful and philosophical temperament, which enabled him to bear up under these constantly recurring disappointments and reverses. It was "no matter," he would say. Crushed for the moment, though he might be, his buoyant heart never lost courage. He had a simple, child-like faith in Providence. "A time will come," he would remark, and this idea consoled him.

Of late, however, this trusting hopefulness of his, as expressed in the beautiful lines we have quoted, appears to have forsaken him. We are sorry for this, we always regarded it as one of the finest traits in his character.

The Stage villain's love for the heroine is sub-

lime in its steadfastness. She is a woman of lugubrious and tearful disposition, added to which she is usually encumbered with a couple of priggish and highly objectionable children, and what possible attraction there is about her we ourselves can never understand ; but the Stage villain—well there, he is fairly mashed on her.

Nothing can alter his affection. She hates him and insults him to an extent that is really unlady-like. Every time he tries to explain his devotion to her, the hero comes in and knocks him down in the middle of it, or the comic man catches him during one or the other of his harassing love scenes with her, and goes off and tells the “villagers” or the “guests,” and they come round and nag him (we should think that the villain must grow to positively dislike the comic man, before the piece is over).

Notwithstanding all this he still hankers after her, and swears she shall be his. He is not a bad-looking fellow, and from what we know of the market, we should say there are plenty of other girls who would jump at him ; yet for the sake of settling down with this dismal young female as his wife, he is prepared to go through a laborious

and exhausting course of crime, and to be bullied and insulted by every one he meets. His love sustains him under it all. He robs and forges, and cheats, and lies, and murders, and arsons. If there were any other crimes he could commit to win her affection, he would, for her sweet sake, commit them cheerfully. But he doesn't know any others—at all events, he is not well up in any others—and she still does not care for him, and what is he to do?

It is very unfortunate for both of them. It is evident, to the merest spectator, that the lady's life would be much happier if the villain did *not* love her quite so much: and, as for him, his career might be calmer, and less criminal, but for his deep devotion to her.

You see it is having met her in early life that is the cause of all the trouble. He first saw her when she was a child, and he loved her, "ay, even then." Ah, and he would have worked—slaved for her, and have made her rich and happy. He might, perhaps, even have been a good man.

She tries to soothe him. She says she loathed him with an unspeakable horror from the first moment that her eyes met his revolting form. She

says she saw a hideous toad once in a nasty pond, and she says that rather would she take that noisome reptile, and clasp its slimy bosom to her own, than tolerate one instant's touch from his (the villain's) arms.

This sweet prattle of hers, however, only charms him all the more. He says he will win her yet.

Nor does the villain seem much happier in his less serious love episodes. After he has indulged in a little badinage of the above character with his real ladylove, the heroine, he will occasionally try a little light flirtation passage with her maid or lady friend.

The maid, or friend, does not waste time in simile or metaphor. She calls him a black-hearted scoundrel, and clumps him over the head.

Of recent years it has been attempted to cheer the Stage villain's loveless life by making the village clergyman's daughter gone on him. But it is generally about ten years ago, when even she loved him, and her love has turned to hate by the time the play opens; so that, on the whole, his lot can hardly be said to have been much improved in this direction.

Not but what it must be confessed that her

change of feeling is, under the circumstances, only natural. He took her away from her happy peaceful home, when she was very young, and brought her up to this wicked overgrown London. He did not marry her. There is no earthly reason why he should not have married her. She must have been a fine girl at that time (and she is a good-looking woman as it is, with dash and go about her), and any other man would have settled down cosily with her, and have led a simple, blameless life.

But the stage villain is built cussed.

He ill uses this female most shockingly—not for any cause or motive whatever, indeed his own practical interests should prompt him to treat her well, and keep friends with her—but from the natural cussedness to which we have just alluded. When he speaks to her, he seizes her by the wrist and breathes what he's got to say into her ear, and it tickles and revolts her.

The only thing in which he is good to her is in the matter of dress. He does not stint her in dress.

The Stage villain is superior to the villain of real life. The villain of real life is actuated by

mere sordid and selfish motives. The Stage villain does villainy, not for any personal advantage to himself, but merely from the love of the thing, as an art. Villainy is, to him, its own reward; he revels in it.

“Better far be poor and villainous,” he says to himself, “than possess all the wealth of the Indies, with a clear conscience.” “I *will* be a villain,” he cries, “I will, at great expense and inconvenience to myself, murder the good old man, get the hero accused of the crime, and make love to his wife, while he is in prison. It will be a risky and laborious business for me, from beginning to end, and can bring me no practical advantage whatever. The girl will call me insulting names, when I pay her a visit, and will push me violently in the chest when I get near her; her golden-haired infant will say I am a bad man, and may even refuse to kiss me. The comic man will cover me with humorous opprobrium; and the villagers will get a day off, and hang about the village pub and hoot me. Everybody will see through my villainy, and I shall be nabbed in the end. I always am. But it is no matter, I will be a villain, ha, ha!”

On the whole, the Stage villain appears to us to be a rather badly used individual. He never has any "estates" or property himself, and his only chance of getting on in the world is to sneak the hero's. He has an affectionate disposition, and, never having any wife of his own, he is compelled to love other people's: but his affection is ever unrequited, and everything comes wrong for him in the end.

Our advice to Stage villains generally, after careful observation of (stage) life, and (stage) human nature, is as follows—

Never be a Stage villain at all, if you can help it. The life is too harassing, and the remuneration altogether disproportionate to the risks and labour.

If you have run away with the clergyman's daughter, and she still clings to you, do not throw her down in the centre of the stage, and call her names. It only irritates her, and she takes a dislike to you, and goes and warns the other girl.

Don't have too many accomplices; and if you *have* got them, don't keep sneering at them and bullying them. A word from them can hang you, and yet you do all you can to rile them. Treat

them civilly, and let them have their fair share of the swag.

Beware of the comic man. When you are committing a murder, or robbing a safe, you never look to see where the comic man is. You are so careless in that way. On the whole it might be as well if you murdered the comic man early in the play.

Don't make love to the hero's wife. She doesn't like you ; how can you expect her to ? Besides, it isn't proper. Why don't you get a girl of your own?

Lastly, don't go down to the scenes of your crimes in the last act. You always will do this. We suppose it is some extra cheap excursion down there that attracts you. But you take our advice, and don't you go. That is always where you get nabbed. The police know your habits from experience. They do not trouble to look for you. They go down, in the last act, to the old hall, or the ruined mill, where you did the deed, and wait for you.

In nine cases out of ten you would get off scot free but for this idiotic custom of yours. Do keep away from the place. Go abroad, or to the seaside when the last act begins, and stop there till it is over. You will be safe then.

THE HEROINE.

SHE is always in trouble—and don't she let you know it, too. Her life is undeniably a hard one. Nothing goes right with her. We all have our troubles, but the Stage heroine never has anything else. If she only got one afternoon a week off from trouble, or had her Sundays free, it would be something.

But no! misfortune stalks beside her from week's beginning to week's end.

After her husband has been found guilty of murder, which is about the least thing that can ever happen to him, and her white-haired father has become a bankrupt, and has died of a broken heart, and the home of her childhood has been sold up, then her infant goes and contracts a lingering fever.

She weeps a good deal during the course of her troubles, which, we suppose, is only natural enough,

poor woman ! But it is depressing from the point of view of the audience, and we almost wish, before the evening is out, that she had not got quite so much trouble.

It is over the child that she does most of her weeping. The child has a damp time of it altogether. We sometimes wonder that it never catches rheumatism.

She is very good, is the Stage heroine. The comic man expresses a belief that she is a born angel. She reproves him for this with a tearful smile (it wouldn't be her smile if it wasn't tearful).

"Oh no," she says (sadly of course), "I have many, many faults."

We rather wish that she would show them a little more. Her excessive goodness seems somehow to pall upon us. Our only consolation, while watching her, is that there are not many good women off the stage. Life is bad enough, as it is ; if there were many women, in real life, as good as the Stage heroine, it would be unbearable.

The Stage heroine's only pleasure in life is to go out in a snowstorm without an umbrella, and with no bonnet on. She has a bonnet, we know (rather a tasteful little thing)—we have seen it

hanging up behind the door of her room ; but when she comes out for a night stroll, during a heavy snowstorm (accompanied by thunder), she is most careful to leave it at home. Maybe she fears the snow will spoil it, and she is a careful girl.

She always brings her child out with her on these excursions. She seems to think that it will freshen it up. The child does not appreciate the snow as much as she does. He says it's cold.

One thing that must irritate the Stage heroine very much, on these occasions, is the way in which the snow seems to lie in wait for her, and follow her about. It is quite a fine night before she comes on the scene ; the moment she appears it begins to snow. It snows heavily all the while she remains about, and, the instant she goes, it clears up again, and keeps dry for the rest of the evening.

The way the snow "goes" for that poor woman is most unfair. It always snows much heavier in the particular spot where she is sitting than it does anywhere else in the whole street. Why, we have sometimes seen a heroine sitting in the midst of a blinding snowstorm, while the other side of

the road was as dry as a bone. And it never seemed to occur to her to cross over.

We have even known a more than usually malignant snowstorm to follow a heroine three times round the stage, and then go off R. with her.

Of course, you can't get away from a snowstorm like that! A Stage snowstorm is the kind of snowstorm that would follow you up stairs, and want to come into bed with you.

Another curious thing about these Stage snowstorms is that the moon is always shining brightly throughout the whole of them. And it shines only on the heroine, and it follows her about, just like the snow does.

Nobody fully understands what a wonderful work of nature the moon is except people acquainted with the stage. Astronomy teaches you something about the moon, but you learn a good deal more from a few visits to a theatre. You will find from the latter that the moon only shines on heroes and heroines, with, perhaps, an occasional beam on the comic man: it always goes out when it sees the villain coming.

It is surprising, too, how quickly the moon *can* go out on the stage. At one moment it is riding

in full radiance in the midst of a cloudless sky, and the next instant it is gone ! Just as though it had been turned off at the meter. It makes you quite giddy at first, until you get used to it.

The Stage heroine is inclined to thoughtfulness rather than gaiety.

In her cheerful moments the Stage heroine thinks she sees the spirit of her mother, or the ghost of her father, or she dreams of her dead baby.

But this is only in her very merry moods. As a rule, she is too much occupied with weeping to have time for frivolous reflections.

She has a great flow of language, and a wonderful gift of metaphor and simile—more forcible than elegant—and this might be rather trying in a wife, under ordinary circumstances. But as the hero is generally sentenced to ten years' penal servitude on his wedding morn, he escapes, for a period, from a danger that might well appal a less fortunate bridegroom.

Sometimes the Stage heroine has a brother, and, if so, he is sure to be mistaken for her lover. We never came across a brother and sister in real life who ever gave the most suspicious person any grounds for mistaking them for lovers ; but the

Stage brother and sister are so affectionate that the error is excusable.

And when the mistake does occur, and the husband comes in suddenly and finds them kissing, and raves, she doesn't turn round and say :

“Why, you silly cuckoo, it's only my brother.”

That would be simple and sensible, and would not suit the Stage heroine at all. No, she does all in her power to make everybody believe it is true, so that she can suffer in silence.

She does so love to suffer.

Marriage is undoubtedly a failure in the case of the Stage heroine.

If the Stage heroine were well advised she would remain single. Her husband means well. He is decidedly affectionate. But he is unfortunate and inexperienced in worldly affairs. Things come right for him at the end of the play, it is true ; but we would not recommend the heroine to place too much reliance upon the continuance of this happy state of affairs. From what we have seen of her husband and his business capabilities, during the five acts preceding, we are inclined to doubt the possibility of his being anything but unfortunate to the end of his career.

True he has at last got his "rights" (which he would never have lost had he had a head instead of a sentimental bladder on his shoulders), the villain is handcuffed, and he and the heroine have settled down comfortably, next door to the comic man.

But this heavenly existence will never last. The Stage hero was built for trouble, and he will be in it again in another month, you bet. They'll get up another mortgage for him on the "estates;" and he won't know, bless you, whether he really did sign it, or whether he didn't, and out he will go.

And he'll slop his name about to documents without ever loooking to see what he's doing, and be let in for Lord knows what; and another wife will turn up for him that he had married, when a boy, and forgotten all about.

And the next corpse that comes to the village he'll get mixed up with—sure to—and have it laid to his door, and there'll be all the old business over again.

No, our advice to the Stage heroine is, to get rid of the hero as soon as possible, marry the villain, and go and live abroad, somewhere where the comic man won't come fooling around.

She will be much happier.

THE COMIC MAN

HE follows the hero all over the world. This is rough on the hero.

What makes him so gone on the hero is that, when they were boys together, the hero used to knock him down and kick him. The comic man remembers this with a glow of pride, when he is grown up ; and it makes him love the hero and determine to devote his life to him.

He is a man of humble station—the comic man. The village blacksmith or a pedlar. You never see a rich or aristocratic comic man on the stage. You can have your choice on the stage ; you can be funny and of lowly origin, or you can be well to-do and without any sense of humour. Peers and policemen are the people most utterly devoid of humour on the stage.

The chief duty of the comic man's life is to make love to servant girls, and they slap his face ;

but it does not discourage him ; he seems to be more smitten by them than ever.

The comic man is happy under any fate, and he says funny things at funerals, and when the bailiffs are in the house, or the hero is waiting to be hanged. This sort of man is rather trying in real life. In real life such a man would probably be slaughtered to death, and buried at an early period of his career, but on the stage they put up with him.

He is very good, is the comic man. He can't abear villainy. To thwart villainy is his life's ambition, and in this noble object fortune backs him up grandly. Bad people come and commit their murders and thefts right under his nose, so that he can denounce them in the last act.

They never see him there, standing close beside them, while they are performing these fearful crimes.

It is marvellous how short-sighted people on the stage are. We always thought that the young lady in real life was moderately good at not seeing folks she did not want to, when they were standing straight in front of her, but her affliction in this direction is as nothing compared with that of her brothers and sisters on the stage.

These unfortunate people come into rooms where there are crowds of people about—people that it is most important that they *should* see, and owing to *not* seeing whom they get themselves into fearful trouble, and they never notice any of them. They talk to somebody opposite, and they can't see a third person that is standing bang between the two of them.

You might fancy they wore blinkers.

Then, again, their hearing is so terribly weak. It really ought to be seen to. People talk and chatter at the very top of their voices, close behind them, and they never hear a word—don't know anybody's there, even. After it has been going on for half an hour, and the people "up stage" have made themselves hoarse with shouting, and somebody has been boisterously murdered, and all the furniture upset, then the people "down stage" "think they hear a noise."

The comic man always rows with his wife, if he is married, or with his sweetheart, if he is not married. They quarrel all day long. It must be a trying life, you would think, but they appear to like it.

How the comic man lives and supports his wife

(she looks as if it wanted something to support her, too) and family is always a mystery to us. As we have said, he is not a rich man, and he never seems to earn any money. Sometimes he keeps a shop, and, in the way he manages business, it must be an expensive thing to keep, for he never charges anybody for anything, he is so generous. All his customers seem to be people more or less in trouble, and he can't find it in his heart to ask them to pay for their goods, under such distressing circumstances.

He stuffs their basket full with twice as much as they came to buy, pushes their money back into their hands, and wipes away a tear.

Why doesn't a comic man come and set up a grocery store in *our* neighbourhood?

When the shop does not prove sufficiently profitable (as under the above explained method sometimes happens to be the case) the comic man's wife seeks to add to the income by taking in lodgers. This is a bad move on her part, for it always ends in the lodgers taking *her* in. The hero and heroine, who seem to have been waiting for something of the sort, immediately come and take possession of the whole house

Of course the comic man could not think of charging, for mere board and lodging, the man who knocked him down when they were boys together! Besides, was not the heroine (now the hero's wife) the sweetest and the blithest girl in all the village of Deepdale? (They must have been a gloomy band, the others!) How can any one with a human heart beneath his bosom suggest that people like that should pay for their rent and washing!

The comic man is shocked at his wife for even thinking of such a thing, and the end of it is that Mr and Mrs Hero live there for the rest of the play, rent free; coals, soap, candles, and hair oil for the child, being provided for them on the same terms.

The hero raises vague and feeble objections to this arrangement now and again. He says he will not hear of such a thing, that he will stay no longer to be a burden upon these honest folk, but will go forth unto the roadside, and there starve. The comic man has awful work with him, but wins at last, and persuades the noble fellow to stop on, and give the place another trial.

When, a morning or so after witnessing one of

these beautiful scenes, our own landlady knocks at our door and creates a disturbance over a paltry matter of three or four weeks' rent, and says she'll have her money or out we go that very day, and drifts slowly away down towards the kitchen, abusing us in a rising voice as she descends, then we think of these things and grow sad.

It is the example of the people round him that makes the comic man so generous. Everybody is generous on the stage. They are giving away their purses all day long: that is the regulation "tip" on the stage,—one's purse. The moment you hear a tale of woe, you grab it out of your pocket, slap it into the woe-or's palm, grip his hand, dash away a tear, and exit: you don't even leave yourself a bus fare home. You walk back quickly, and get another purse.

Middle-class people and others, on the stage, who are short of purses, have to content themselves with throwing about rolls of bank notes, and tipping servants with five pound cheques. Very stingy people, on the stage, have been known to be so cussed mean as to give away mere sovereigns.

But they are generally only villains or lords

that descend to this sort of thing. Respectable stage folk never offer anything less than a purse.

The recipient is very grateful on receiving the purse (he never looks inside), and thinks that Heaven ought to reward the donor. They get a lot of work out of Heaven, on the stage. Heaven does all the odd jobs for them that they don't want to go to the trouble and expense of doing for themselves. Heaven's chief duty, on the stage, is to see to the repayment of all those sums of money that are given or lent to the good people. It is generally requested to do this to the tune of a "thousandfold," an exorbitant rate, when you come to think of it.

Heaven is also expected to take care that the villain gets properly cursed, and to fill up its spare time by bringing misfortune upon the local landlord. It has to avenge everybody, and to help all the good people whenever they are in trouble. And they keep it going in this direction.

And when the hero leaves for prison, Heaven has to take care of his wife and child till he comes out; and if this isn't a handful for it, we don't know what would be!

Heaven, on the stage, is always on the side of the hero and heroine, and against the police.

Occasionally, of late years, the comic man has been a bad man, but you can't hate him for it. What if he does ruin the hero and rob the heroine, and help to murder the good old man! He does it all in such a genial, light-hearted spirit, that it is not in one's heart to feel angry with him. It is the way in which a thing is done that makes all the difference.

Besides, he can always round on his pal, the serious villain, at the end, and that makes it all right.

The comic man is not a sportsman. If he goes out shooting, we know that when he returns we shall hear that he has shot the dog. If he takes his girl out on the river he upsets her (literally we mean). The comic man never goes out for a day's pleasure without coming home a wreck.

If he merely goes to tea with his girl at her mother's, he swallows a muffin and chokes himself.

The comic man is not happy in his married life, nor does it seem to us that he goes the right way to be so. He calls his wife "his old Dutch

clock," "the old geyser," and such like terms of endearment, and addresses her with such remarks as "Ah, you old cat," "You ugly old nutmeg grater," "You orangamatang, you!" etc., etc.

Well, you know, that is not the way to make things pleasant about a house.

Still, with all his faults, we like the comic man. He is not always in trouble, and he does not make long speeches.

Let us bless him.

THE LAWYER

HE is very old, and very long, and very thin. He has white hair. He dresses in the costume of the last generation but seven. He has bushy eyebrows, and is clean shaven. His chin itches, considerably, so that he has to be always scratching it. His favourite remark is "Ah."

In real life, we have heard of young solicitors, of foppish solicitors, of short solicitors; but, on the stage, they are always very thin and very old. The youngest Stage solicitor we ever remember to have seen, looked about sixty—the oldest, about a hundred and forty-five.

By-the-bye, it is never very safe to judge people's ages, on the stage, by their personal appearance. We have known old ladies who looked seventy, if they were a day, turn out to be the mothers of boys of fourteen, while the middle-aged husband of the young wife generally gives one the idea of ninety.

Again, what appears at first sight to be a comfortable looking and eminently respectable elderly lady is often discovered to be, in reality, a giddy, girlish, and inexperienced young thing, the pride of the village or the darling of the regiment.

So, too, an exceptionally stout and short-winded old gentleman, who looks as if he had been living too well, and taking too little exercise for the last forty-five years, is not the heavy father, as you might imagine if you judged from mere external evidence, but a wild reckless boy.

You would not think so to look at him, but his only faults are that he is so young and light-headed. There is good in him, however, and he will no doubt be steady enough, when he grows up. All the young men of the neighbourhood worship him, and the girls love him.

"Here he comes," they say, "dear, dear old Jack—Jack, the darling boy—the headstrong youth—Jack, the leader of our juvenile sports, Jack! whose childish innocence wins all hearts. Three cheers for dancing, bright-eyed Jack!"

On the other hand, ladies with the complexion of eighteen are, you learn as the story progresses, quite elderly women, the mothers of middle-aged heroes.

The experienced observer of Stage-land never jumps to conclusions from what he sees. He waits till he is told things.

The Stage lawyer never has any office of his own. He transacts all his business at his clients' houses. He will travel hundreds of miles to tell them the most trivial piece of legal information.

It never occurs to him how much simpler it would be to write a letter. The item for "traveling expenses," in his bill of costs, must be something enormous.

There are two moments in the course of his client's career, that the Stage lawyer particularly enjoys. The first is when the client comes unexpectedly into a fortune; the second, when he unexpectedly loses it.

In the former case, upon learning the good news, the Stage lawyer at once leaves his business, and hurries off to the other end of the kingdom to bear the glad tidings. He arrives at the humble domicile of the beneficiary in question, sends up his card, and is ushered into the front parlour. He enters mysteriously, and sits left, client sits right. An ordinary, common lawyer would come to the point at once, state the matter

in a plain, business-like way, and trust that he might have the pleasure of representing, &c., &c. ; but such simple methods are not those of the Stage lawyer. He looks at the client, and says :

“ You had a father.”

The client starts. How on earth did this calm, thin, keen-eyed old man in black know that he had a father? He shuffles and stammers, but the quiet, impenetrable lawyer fixes his cold, glassy eye on him, and he is helpless. Subterfuge, he feels, is useless, and amazed, bewildered, at the knowledge of his most private affairs, possessed by his strange visitant, he admits the fact : he had a father.

The lawyer smiles with a quiet smile of triumph, and scratches his chin.

“ You had a mother, too, if I am informed correctly,” he continues.

It is idle attempting to escape this man’s supernatural acuteness, and the client owns up to having had a mother also.

From this, the lawyer goes on to communicate to the client, as a great secret, the whole of his (the client’s) history from his cradle upwards, and also the history of his nearer relatives, and in less

than half-an-hour from the old man's entrance, or say, forty minutes, at the outside, the client almost knows what the business is about.

On the other occasion, when the client has lost his fortune, the Stage lawyer is even still happier. He comes down himself to tell the misfortune (he would not miss the job for worlds), and he takes care to choose the most unpropitious moment possible for breaking the news. On the eldest daughter's birthday, when there is a big party on, is his favourite time. He comes in about midnight, and tells them just as they are going down to supper.

He has no idea of business hours, has the Stage lawyer—to make the thing as unpleasant as possible seems to be his only anxiety.

If he cannot work it for a birthday, then he waits till there's a wedding on, and gets up early in the morning on purpose to run down and spoil the show. To enter among a crowd of happy, joyous fellow-creatures, and leave them utterly crushed and miserable is the Stage lawyer's hobby.

The Stage lawyer is a very talkative gentleman. He regards the telling of his client's most private affairs to every stranger that he meets, as part of

his professional duties. A good gossip, with a few chance acquaintances, about the family secrets of his employers, is food and drink for the Stage lawyer.

They all go about telling their own and their friends' secrets, to perfect strangers on the stage. Whenever two people have five minutes to spare, on the stage, they tell each other the story of their lives. "Sit down and I will tell you the story of my life," is the stage equivalent for the "Come and have a drink," of the outside world.

The good Stage lawyer has generally nursed the heroine on his knee, when a baby (when *she* was a baby, we mean)—when she was only *so* high. It seems to have been a part of his professional duties. The good Stage lawyer also kisses all the pretty girls in the play, and is expected to chuck the housemaid under the chin. It is good to be a good Stage lawyer.

The good Stage lawyer also wipes away a tear when sad things happen ; and he turns away to do this, and blows his nose, and says he thinks he has a fly in his eye. This touching trait in his character is always held in great esteem by the audience, and is much applauded.

The good Stage lawyer is never, by any chance, a married man. (Few good men are, so we gather from our married lady friends.) He loved, in early life, the heroine's mother. That "sainted woman" (tear and nose business) died, and is now among the angels—the gentleman who did marry her, by-the-bye, is not quite so sure about this latter point, but the lawyer is fixed on the idea.

In stage literature of a frivolous nature, the lawyer is a very different individual. In comedy, he is young, he possesses chambers, and he is married (there is no doubt about this latter fact); and his wife and his mother-in-law spend most of the day in his office, and make the dull old place quite lively for him.

He only has one client. She is a nice lady, and affable, but her antecedents are doubtful, and she seems to be no better than she ought to be—possibly worse. But anyhow, she is the sole business that the poor fellow has—is, in fact, his only source of income, and might, one would think, under such circumstances, be accorded a welcome by his family. But his wife and his mother-in-law, on the contrary, take a violent dislike to her; and the lawyer has to put her in the

coal scuttle, or lock her up in the safe, whenever he hears either of these female relatives of his coming up the stairs.

We should not care to be the client of a farcical comedy Stage lawyer. Legal transactions are trying to the nerves under the most favourable circumstances; conducted by a farcical Stage lawyer, the business would be too exciting for us.

THE ADVENTURESS

SHE sits on a table and smokes a cigarette. A cigarette on the stage is always the badge of infamy.

In real life the cigarette is usually the hall-mark of the particularly mild and harmless individual. It is the dissipation of the Y.M.C.A. ; the innocent joy of the pure-hearted boy, long ere the demoralising influence of our vaunted civilisation has dragged him down into the depths of the short clay.

But behind the cigarette on the stage, lurks ever black-hearted villainy and abandoned womanhood.

The adventuress is generally of foreign extraction. They do not make bad women in England, the article is entirely of continental manufacture, and has to be imported. She speaks English with a charming little French accent, and she makes up for this by speaking French with a good sound English one.

She seems a smart business woman, and she would probably get on very well if it were not for her friends and relations. Friends and relations are a trying class of people, even in real life, as we all know, but the friends and relations of the Stage adventuress are a particularly irritating lot. They never leave her, never does she get a day or an hour off from them. Wherever she goes, there the whole tribe goes with her.

They all go with her in a body when she calls on her young man, and it is as much as she can do to persuade them to go into the next room, even for five minutes, and give her a chance. When she is married they come and live with her.

They know her dreadful secret, and it keeps them in comfort for years. Knowing somebody's secret seems, on the stage, to be one of the most profitable and least exhausting professions going.

She is fond of married life, is the adventuress, and she goes in for it pretty extensively. She has husbands all over the globe, most of them in prison, but they escape and turn up in the last act, and spoil all the poor girl's plans. That is so like husbands—no consideration, no thought for their poor wives.

They are not a prepossessing lot either, those early husbands of hers. What she could have seen in them to induce her to marry them is indeed a mystery.

The adventuress dresses magnificently. Where she gets the money from we never could understand, for she and her companions are always more or less complaining of being "stone broke." Dress-makers must be a trusting people where she comes from.

The adventuress is like the proverbial cat as regards the number of lives she is possessed of. You never know when she is *really* dead. Most people like to die once and have done with it, but the adventuress, after once or twice trying it, seems to get quite to like it, and goes on giving way to it, and then it grows upon her until she can't help herself, and it becomes a sort of craving with her.

This habit of hers is, however, a very trying one for her friends and husbands, it makes things so uncertain. Something ought to be done to break her off it. Her husbands, on hearing that she is dead, go into raptures, and rush off and marry other people, and then, just as they are starting

off on their new honeymoon, up she crops again, as fresh as paint. It is really most annoying.

For ourselves, were we the husband of a Stage adventuress, we should never, after what we have seen of the species, feel quite justified in believing her to be dead, unless we had killed and buried her ourselves ; and even then we should be more easy in our minds if we could arrange to sit on her grave for a week or so afterwards. These women are so artful !

But it is not only the adventuress who will persist in coming to life again, every time she is slaughtered. They all do it on the stage. They are all so unreliable in this respect. It must be most disheartening to the murderers.

And then again, it is something extraordinary, when you come to think of it, what a tremendous amount of killing some of them can stand, and still come up smiling in the next act, not a penny the worse for it. They get stabbed, and shot, and thrown over precipices thousands of feet high, and, bless you, it does them good—it is like a tonic to them.

As for the young man that is coming home to see his girl, you simply *can't* kill him. Achilles

was a summer rose compared with him. Nature and mankind have not sufficient materials in hand, as yet, to kill that man. Science has but the strength of a puling babe against his invulnerability. You can waste your time on earthquakes and shipwrecks, volcanic eruptions, floods, explosions, railway accidents, and such like sort of things, if you are foolish enough to do so ; but it is no good your imagining that anything of the kind can hurt him, because it can't.

There will be thousands of people killed, thousands in each instance, but one human being will always escape, and that one human being will be the Stage young man who is coming home to see his girl.

He is for ever being *reported* as dead, but it always turns out to be another fellow who was like him, or who had on his (the young man's) hat. *He* is bound to be out of it, whoever else may be in.

"If I had been at my post that day," he explains to his sobbing mother, "I should have been blown up, but the Providence that watches over good men had ordained that I should be lying blind-drunk in Blogg's saloon at the time the explosion took place, and so the other engineer, who had

been doing my work when it was his turn to be off, was killed along with the whole of the crew."

"Ah, thank Heaven, thank Heaven for that!" ejaculates the pious old lady, and the comic man is so overcome with devout joy that he has to relieve his overstrained heart by drawing his young woman on one side, and grossly insulting her.

All attempts to kill this young man ought really to be given up now. The job has been tried over and over again by villains and bad people of all kinds, but no one has ever succeeded. There has been an amount of energy and ingenuity expended in seeking to lay up that one man which, properly utilised, might have finished off ten million ordinary mortals. It is sad to think of so much wasted effort.

He, the young man coming home to see his girl, need never take an insurance ticket, or even buy a *Tit Bits*. It would be needless expenditure in his case.

On the other hand, and to make matters equal, as it were, there are some Stage people so delicate that it is next door to impossible to keep them alive.

The inconvenient husband is a most pathetic example of this. Medical science is powerless to

save that man when the last act comes round ; indeed, we doubt whether medical science, in its present state of development, could even tell what is the matter with him, or why he dies at all. He looks healthy and robust enough, and nobody touches him, yet down he drops without a word of warning, stone-dead, in the middle of the floor—he always dies in the middle of the floor. Some folks like to die in bed, but Stage people don't. They like to die on the floor. We all have our different tastes.

The adventuress herself is another person who dies with remarkable ease. We suppose in her case, it is being so used to it that makes her so quick and clever at it. There is no lingering illness and doctor's bills, and upsetting of the whole household arrangements, about her method. One walk round the stage and the thing is done.

All bad characters die quickly on the stage. Good characters take a long time over it, and have a sofa down in the drawing-room to do it on, and have sobbing relatives and good old doctors fooling around them, and can smile and forgive everybody. Bad Stage characters have to do the whole job, dying speech and all, in

about ten seconds, and do it with all their clothes on into the bargain, which must make it most uncomfortable.

It is repentance that kills off the bad people in plays. They always repent, and the moment they repent they die. Repentance, on the stage, seems to be one of the most dangerous things a man can be taken with. Our advice to Stage wicked people would undoubtedly be, "Never repent. If you value your life, don't repent. It always means sudden death!"

To return to our adventuress, she is by no means a bad woman. There is much good in her. This is more than proved by the fact that she learns to love the hero before she dies; for no one but a really good woman, capable of extraordinary patience and gentleness, could ever, we are convinced, grow to feel any other sentiment for that irritating ass than a desire to throw bricks at him.

The Stage adventuress would be a much better woman, too, if it were not for the heroine. The adventuress makes the most complete arrangements for being noble and self-sacrificing, that is for going away and never coming back, and is

just about to carry them out, when the heroine, who has a perfect genius for being in the wrong place at the right time, comes in and spoils it all. No Stage adventuress can be good while the heroine is about. The sight of the heroine rouses every bad feeling in her breast.

We can sympathise with her in this respect. The heroine often affects ourselves in precisely the same way.

There is a good deal to be said in favour of the adventuress. True she possesses rather too much sarcasm and repartee to make things quite agreeable round the domestic hearth, and, when she has got all her clothes on, there is not much room left in the place for anybody else; but, taken on the whole, she is decidedly attractive. She has grit and go in her. She is alive. She can do something to help herself besides calling for "George."

She has not got a Stage child—if she ever had one, she has left it on somebody else's doorstep, which, presuming there was no water handy to drown it in, seems to be about the most sensible thing she could have done with it. She is not oppressively good.

She never wants to be "unhanded," or "let to pass." She is not always being shocked or insulted by people telling her that they love her; she does not seem to mind it if they do. She is not always fainting, and crying, and sobbing, and wailing, and moaning, like the good people in the play are.

Oh, they do have an unhappy time of it—the good people in plays! Then she is the only person in the piece who can sit on the comic man.

We sometimes think it would be a fortunate thing—for him—if they allowed her to marry and settle down quietly with the hero. She *might* make a man of him, in time.

THE SERVANT GIRL

THERE are two types of servant girl to be met with on the stage. This is an unusual allowance for one profession.

There is the lodging-house slavey. She has a good heart, and a smutty face, and is always dressed according to the latest fashion in scare-crows.

Her leading occupation is the cleaning of boots. She cleans boots all over the house, at all hours of the day. She comes and sits down on the hero's breakfast table, and cleans them over the poor fellow's food. She comes into the drawing-room cleaning boots.

She has her own method of cleaning them, too. She rubs off the mud, puts on the blacking, and polishes up all with the same brush. They take an enormous amount of polishing, she seems to do nothing else all day long but walk about shin-

ing one boot, and she breathes on it and rubs it till you wonder there is any leather left, yet it never seems to get any brighter, nor, indeed, can you expect it to, for when you look closely you see it is a patent leather boot that she has been throwing herself away upon all this time.

Somebody has been having a lark with the poor girl.

The lodging-house slavey brushes her hair with the boot brush, and blacks the end of her nose with it.

We were acquainted with a lodging-house slavey once—a real one, we mean. She was the hand-maiden at a house in Bloomsbury, where we once hung out. She was untidy in her dress, it is true, but she had not quite that castaway and gone-to-sleep-in-a-dustbin appearance that we, an earnest student of the drama, felt she ought to present, and we questioned her one day on the subject.

“How is it, Sophronia,” we said, “that you distantly resemble a human being instead of giving one the idea of an animated rag-shop? Don’t you ever polish your nose with the blacking brush, or rub coal into your head, or wash your face in

treacle, or put skewers into your hair, or anything of that sort, like they do on the stage?"

She said, "Lord love you, what should I want to go and be a bally idiot like that for?"

And we have not liked to put the question elsewhere since then.

The other type of servant girl on the stage—the villa servant girl—is a very different personage. She is a fetching little thing, and dresses bewitchingly, and is always clean. Her duties are to dust the legs of the chairs in the drawing-room. That is the only work she ever has to do, but it must be confessed she does that thoroughly. She never comes into the room without dusting the legs of these chairs, and she dusts them again before she goes out.

If anything ought to be free from dust in a stage house, it should be the legs of the drawing-room chairs.

She is going to marry the man-servant, is the Stage servant girl, as soon as they have saved up sufficient out of their wages to buy an hotel. They think they will like to keep an hotel. They don't understand a bit about the business, which we believe is a complicated one, but this does not trouble them in the least

They quarrel a good deal over their love-making, do the Stage servant girl and her young man, and they always come into the drawing-room to do it. They have got the kitchen, and there is the garden (with a fountain and mountains in the background—you can see it through the window), but no! no place in or about the house is good enough for them to quarrel in except the drawing-room. They quarrel there so vigorously that it even interferes with the dusting of the chair legs.

She ought not to be long in saving up sufficient to marry on, for the generosity of people on the stage, to the servants there, makes one seriously consider the advisability of ignoring the unremunerative professions of ordinary life, and starting a new and more promising career as a Stage servant.

No one ever dreams of tipping the Stage servant with *less* than a sovereign when they ask her if her mistress is at home, or give her a letter to post, and there is quite a rush at the end of the piece to stuff five-pound notes into her hand. The good old man gives her ten.

The Stage servant is very impudent to her

mistress, and the master—he falls in love with her, and it does upset the house so.

Sometimes the servant girl is good and faithful, and then she is Irish. All good servant girls on the stage are Irish.

All the male visitors are expected to kiss the Stage servant girl when they come into the house, and to dig her in the ribs, and to say, “Do you know, Jane, I think you’re an uncommonly nice girl—click.” They always say this, and she likes it.

Many years ago, when we were young, we thought we would see if things were the same off the stage, and the next time we called at a certain friend’s house, we tried this business on.

She wasn’t *quite* so dazzlingly beautiful as they are on the stage, but we passed that. She showed us up into the drawing-room, and then said she would go and tell her mistress we were there.

We felt this was the time to begin. We skipped between her and the door. We held our hat in front of us, and cocked our head on one side, and said, “Don’t go! don’t go!”

The girl seemed alarmed. We began to get

a little nervous ourselves, but we had begun it, and we meant to go through with it.

We said, "Do you know, Jane" (her name wasn't Jane, but that wasn't our fault), "do you know, Jane, I think you're an uncommonly nice girl," and we said "click," and dug her in the ribs with our elbow, and then chucked her under the chin. The whole thing seemed to fall flat. There was nobody there to laugh or applaud. We wished we hadn't done it. It seemed stupid, when you came to think of it. We began to feel frightened. The business wasn't going as we expected; but we screwed up our courage, and went on.

We put on the customary expression of comic imbecility, and beckoned the girl to us. We have never seen this fail on the stage.

But this girl seemed made wrong. She got behind the sofa, and screamed "Help!"

We have never known them to do this on the stage, and it threw us out in our plans. We did not know exactly what to do. We regretted that we had ever begun this job, and heartily wished ourselves out of it. But it appeared foolish to pause then, when we were more than

half way through, and we made a rush to get it over.

We chivied the girl round the sofa, and caught her near the door, and kissed her. She scratched our face, yelled police, murder, and fire, and fled from the room.

Our friend came in almost immediately. He said,

“ I say, J., old man, are you drunk ? ”

We told him no, that we were only a student of the drama.

His wife then entered in a towering passion. She didn't ask us if we were drunk. She said,

“ How dare you come here in this state ! ”

We endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to induce her to believe that we were sober ; and we explained that our course of conduct was what was always pursued on the stage.

She said she didn't care what was done on the stage, it wasn't going to be pursued in her house ; and that if her husband's friends couldn't behave as gentlemen they had better stop away.

A few more chatty remarks were exchanged, and then we took our leave.

The following morning we received a letter from

a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn with reference, so they put it, to the brutal and unprovoked assault committed by us on the previous afternoon upon the person of their client, Miss Matilda Hemmings. The letter stated that we had punched Miss Hemmings in the side, struck her under the chin, and, afterwards, seizing her as she was leaving the room, proceeded to commit a gross assault, into the particulars of which it was needless for them to enter at greater length.

It added that if we were prepared to render an ample written apology, and to pay fifty pounds compensation, they would advise their client, Miss Matilda Hemmings, to allow the matter to drop, otherwise, criminal proceedings would at once be commenced against us.

We took the letter to our own solicitors, and explained the circumstances to them. They said it seemed to be a very sad case, but advised us to pay the fifty pounds, and we borrowed the money, and did so.

Since then we have lost faith, somehow, in the British drama as a guide to the conduct of life.

THE CHILD

IT is nice and quiet and it talks pretty.

We have come across real infants, now and then, in the course of visits to married friends ; they have been brought to us from outlying parts of the house, and introduced to us for our edification ; and we have found them gritty and sticky. Their boots have usually been muddy, and they have wiped them up against our new trousers. And their hair has suggested the idea that they have been standing on their heads in the dust-bin.

And they have talked to us—but not pretty, not at all—rather rude we should call it.

But the Stage child is very different. It is clean and tidy. You can touch it anywhere and nothing comes off. Its face glows with soap and water. From the appearance of its hands it is evident that mud pies and tar are joys unknown to it. As for its hair, there is something uncanny about

its smoothness and respectability. Even its boot laces are done up.

We have never seen anything like the Stage child, outside a theatre, excepting once—that was on the pavement in front of a tailor's shop in Tottenham Court Road. He stood on a bit of round wood, and it was fifteen and nine, his style.

We thought in our ignorance, prior to this, that there could not be anything in the world like the Stage child, but, you see we were mistaken.

The Stage child is affectionate to its parents, and its nurse ; and is respectful in its demeanour towards those whom Providence has placed in authority over it ; and so far, it is certainly much to be preferred to the real article. It speaks of its male and female progenitors as “ dear, dear papa,” and “ dear, dear mama,” and it refers to its nurse as “ darling nursey.” We are connected with a youthful child ourselves—a real one—a nephew. He alludes to his father (when his father is *not* present) as “ the old man ;” and always calls the nurse “ old nutcrackers.” Why cannot they make real children who say “ dear, dear mama,” and “ dear, dear papa.”

The Stage child is much superior to the live

infant, in every way. The Stage child does not go rampaging about a house and screeching and yelling, till nobody knows whether they are on their head or their heels.

A Stage child does not get up at five o'clock in the morning to practise playing on a penny whistle. A Stage child never wants a bicycle, and drives you mad about it. A Stage child does not ask twenty complicated questions a minute about things that you don't understand, and then wind up by asking why you don't seem to know anything, and why wouldn't anybody teach you anything when you were a little boy.

The Stage child does not wear out a hole in the seat of its knickerbockers, and have to have a patch let in. The Stage child comes down stairs on its *feet*.

The Stage child never brings home six other children to play at horses in the front garden, and then wants to know if they can all come in to tea. The Stage child never has the whooping cough, and the measles, and every other disease that it can lay its hands on, and be laid up with them one after the other, and turn the house upside down.

The Stage child's department in the scheme of life is to harrow up its mother's feelings by ill-timed and uncalled for questions about its father. It always wants to know, before a roomful of people, where "dear papa" is, and why he has left dear mama ; when, as all the guests know, the poor man is doing his two years' hard, or waiting to be hanged.

It makes everybody so uncomfortable.

It is always harrowing up somebody—the Stage child,—it really ought not to be left about, as it is. When it has done upsetting its mother, it fishes out some broken-hearted maid, who has just been cruelly severed for ever from her lover, and asks her in a high falsetto voice, why she doesn't get married, and prattles to her about love, and domestic bliss, and young men, and any other subject it can think of, particularly calculated to lacerate the poor girl's heart, until her brain nearly gives way.

After that it runs amuck, up and down the whole play, and makes everybody sit up, all round. It asks eminently respectable old maids if they wouldn't like to have a baby ; and it wants to know why bald-headed old men have left off

wearing hair, and why other old gentlemen have red noses, and if they were always that colour.

In some plays, it so happens that the less said about the origin and source of the Stage child the better ; and, in such cases, nothing will appear so important to that contrary brat as to know, in the middle of an evening party, who its father was !

Everybody loves the Stage child. They catch it up in their bosoms every other minute and weep over it. They take it in turns to do this.

Nobody—on the stage, we mean—ever has enough of the Stage child. Nobody ever tells the Stage child to “shut up,” or to “get out of this.” Nobody ever clumps the Stage child over the head.

When the real child goes to the theatre it must notice these things, and wish *it* were a Stage child.

The Stage child is much admired by the audience. Its pathos makes them weep ; its tragedy thrills them ; its declamation, as for instance, when it takes the centre of the stage, and says it will kill the wicked man, and the police, and everybody who hurts its mar, stirs them like a trumpet note ; and its light comedy is generally

held to be the most truly humorous thing in the whole range of dramatic art.

But there are some people so strangely constituted that they do not appreciate the Stage child ; they do not comprehend its uses ; they do not understand its beauties.

We should not be angry with them. We should the rather pity them.

We ourselves had a friend once who suffered from this misfortune. He was a married man, and Providence had been very gracious, very good to him : he had been blessed with eleven children, and they were all growing up well and strong.

The "baby" was eleven weeks old, and then came the twins, who were getting on for fifteen months, and were cutting their double teeth nicely. The youngest girl was three, and there were five boys aged seven, eight, nine, ten, and twelve respectively—good enough lads, but—well there, boys will be boys, you know ; we were just the same ourselves when we were young. The two eldest were both very pleasant girls, as their mother said, the only pity was that they would quarrel so with each other.

We never knew a healthier set of boys and girls. They were so full of energy and dash.

Our friend was very much out of sorts one evening when we called on him. It was holiday time, and wet weather. He had been at home all day, and so had all the children. He was telling his wife, when we entered the room, that if the holidays were to last much longer and those twins did not hurry up and get their teeth quickly, he should have to go away and join the County Council. He could not stand the racket.

His wife said she could not see what he had to complain of. She was sure better-hearted children no man could have.

Our friend said he did not care a damn about their hearts. It was their legs, and arms, and lungs that were driving him crazy.

He also said that he would go out with us and get away from it for a bit, or he should go mad.

He proposed a theatre, and we accordingly made our way towards the Strand. Our friend, in closing the door behind him, said he could not tell us what a relief it was to get away from those children. He said he loved children very much indeed, but that it was a mistake to have too much

of anything, however much you liked it, and that he had come to the conclusion that twenty-two hours a day of them was enough for any one.

He said he did not want to see another child or hear another child until he got home. He wanted to forget that there were such things as children in the world.

We got up to the Strand and dropped into the first theatre we came to. The curtain was up, and on the stage was a small child, standing in its nightshirt and screaming for its mother.

Our friend looked, said one word and bolted, and we followed.

We went a little further, and dropped into another theatre.

There, there were *two* children on the stage. Some grown-up people were standing round them listening, in respectful attitudes, while the children talked. They appeared to be lecturing about something.

Again we fled, swearing, and made our way to a third theatre. They were *all* children there. It was somebody or other's Children's Company performing an opera, or pantomime, or something of that sort.

Our friend said he would not venture in another theatre. He said he had heard there were places called music halls, and he begged us to take him to one of these, and not to tell his wife.

We inquired of a policeman and found that there really were such places, and we took him into one.

The first thing we saw were two little boys doing tricks on a horizontal bar.

Our friend was about to repeat his customary programme of flying and cursing, but we restrained him. We assured him that he really would see a grown-up person if he waited a bit, so he sat out the boys and also their little sister on a bicycle, and waited for the next item.

It turned out to be an infant phenomenon who sang and danced in fourteen different costumes, and we once more fled.

Our friend said he could not go home in the state he was then, he felt sure he should kill the twins, if he did. He pondered for a while, and then he thought he would go and hear some music. He said he thought a little music would soothe and ennoble him—make him feel more like a Christian than he did at that precise moment,

We were near St James's Hall, so we went in there.

The hall was densely crowded, and we had great difficulty in forcing our way to our seats. We reached them at length, and then turned our eyes towards the orchestra.

"The marvellous boy pianist—only ten years old!" was giving a recital.

Then our friend rose and said he thought he would give it up and go home.

We asked him if he would like to try any other place of amusement, but he said, "No." He said that, when you came to think of it, it seemed a waste of money for a man with eleven children of his own to go about to places of entertainment now-a-days.

THE COMIC LOVERS

OH they are funny !

The comic lovers' mission in life is to serve as a sort of "relief" to the misery, caused the audience by the other characters in the play ; and all that is wanted now is something that will be a relief to the comic lovers.

They have nothing to do with the play, but they come on immediately after anything very sad has happened, and make love. This is why we watch sad scenes on the stage with such patience. We are not eager for them to be got over. Maybe, they are very uninteresting scenes, as well as sad ones, and they make us yawn ; but we have no desire to see them hurried through. The longer they take, the better pleased we are : we know that, when they are finished, the comic lovers will come on.

They are always very rude to one another, the comic lovers. Everybody is more or less rude

and insulting to everybody else, on the stage; they call it repartee, there! We tried the effect of a little Stage "repartee," once, upon some people in real life, and we wished we hadn't, afterwards. It was too subtle for them. They summoned us before a magistrate for "using language calculated to cause a breach of the peace." We were fined two pounds, and costs!

They are more lenient to "wit and humour" on the stage, and know how to encourage the art of vituperation. But the comic lovers carry the practice almost to excess. They are more than rude, they are abusive. They insult each other from morning to night. What their married life will be like, we shudder to think!

In the various slanging matches and bullying competitions, which form their courtship, it is always the maiden that is most successful. Against her merry flow of invective, and her girlish wealth of offensive personalities, the insolence and abuse of her boyish adorer cannot stand for one moment.

To give an idea of how the comic lovers woo, we, perhaps, cannot do better than subjoin the following brief example:—

Scene: Main thoroughfare in populous district of London. Time: Noon. Not a soul to be seen anywhere.

Enter comic loveress R., walking in the middle of the road.

Enter comic lover L., also walking in the middle of the road.

They neither see the other one, until they bump against each other in the centre.

He. Why, Jane! Who'd a' thought o' meeting you here!

She. You evidently didn't—stupid!

He. Hulloo! got out o' bed the wrong side again. I say, Jane, if you go on like that you'll never get a man to marry you.

She. So I thought, when I engaged myself to you.

He. Oh! come Jane, don't be hard.

She. Well, one of us must be hard. You're soft enough.

He. Yes, I shouldn't want to marry you, if I weren't. Ha! ha! ha!

She. Oh you gibbering idiot (*said archly*).

He. So glad I am. We shall make a capital match (*attempts to kiss her*).

She (slipping away). Yes, and you'll find I'm a

match that can strike (*fetches him a violent blow over the side of the head*).

He (*holding his jaw—in a literal sense, we mean*).
I can't help feeling smitten by her.

She. Yes, I'm a bit of a spanker, aint I?

He. Spanker! *I* call you a regular stunner.
You've nearly made me silly.

She (*laughing playfully*). No, nature did that for you, Joe, long ago.

He. Ah, well, you've made me *smart* enough now. You boss-eyed old cow, you!

She. Cow! am I? Ah, I suppose that's what makes me so fond of a *calf*! You German sausage on legs! You—

He. Go along. Your mother brought you up on sour milk.

She. Yah! They weaned you on thistles, didn't they?

And so on, with such like badinage do they hang about in the middle of that road, showering derision and contumely upon each other for full ten minutes, when, with one culminating burst of mutual abuse, they go off together, fighting; and the street is left once more, deserted.

It is very curious, by-the-bye, how deserted all

public places become, whenever a stage character is about. It would seem as though ordinary citizens sought to avoid them. We have known a couple of Stage villains to have Waterloo Bridge, Lancaster Place, and a bit of the Strand entirely to themselves, for nearly a quarter-of-an-hour on a summer's afternoon, while they plotted a most diabolical outrage.

As for Trafalgar Square, the hero always chooses that spot, when he wants to get away from the busy crowd and commune, in solitude, with his own bitter thoughts; and the good old lawyer leaves his office, and goes there to discuss any very delicate business over which he particularly does not wish to be disturbed.

And they all make speeches there to an extent sufficient to have turned the hair of the late lamented Sir Charles Warren white with horror. But it is all right, because there is nobody near to hear them. As far as the eye can reach, not a living thing is to be seen. Northumberland Avenue, the Strand, and St Martin's Lane are simply a wilderness. The only sign of life about is a bus at the top of Whitehall, and it appears to be blocked. How it has managed to get blocked we cannot say. It has the whole road to itself; and

is, in fact, itself the only traffic for miles around. Yet there it sticks, for hours. The police make no attempt to move it on, and the passengers seem quite contented.

The Thames Embankment is an even still more lonesome and desolate part. Wounded (stage) spirits fly from the haunts of men, and, leaving the hard, cold world far, far behind them, go and die in peace on the Thames Embankment. And other wanderers, finding their skeletons afterwards, bury them there, and put up rude crosses over the graves to mark the spot.

The comic lovers are often very young; and, when people on the stage are young, they *are* young. He is supposed to be about sixteen, and she is fifteen. But they both talk as if they were not more than seven.

In real life, "boys" of sixteen know a thing or two, we have generally found. The average "boy" of sixteen, now-a-days, usually smokes cavendish, and does a little on the Stock Exchange, or makes a book: and, as for love: he has quite got over it by that age. On the stage, however, the new born babe is not in it for innocence with the boy lover of sixteen.

So, too, with the maiden. Most girls of fifteen, off the stage, so our experience goes, know as much as there is any actual necessity for them to know, Mr Gilbert notwithstanding ; but when we see a young lady of fifteen on the stage, we wonder where her cradle is.

The comic lovers do not have the facilities for love making that the hero and heroine do. The hero and heroine have big rooms to make love in, with a fire and plenty of easy chairs, so that they can sit about in picturesque attitudes, and do it comfortably. Or if they want to do it out of doors, they have a ruined abbey, with a big stone seat in the centre, and moonlight.

The comic lovers, on the other hand, have to do it, standing up all the time, in busy streets, or in cheerless-looking, and curiously narrow rooms, in which there is no furniture whatever, and no fire.

And there is always a tremendous row going on in the house, when the comic lovers are making love. Somebody always seems to be putting up pictures in the next room, and putting them up boisterously too ; so that the comic lovers have to shout at each other.

THE PEASANTS

THEY are so clean. We have seen peasantry off the stage, and it has presented an untidy—occasionally a disreputable and unwashed appearance ; but the Stage peasant seems to spend all his wages on soap and hair oil.

They are always round the corner—or rather round the two corners—and they come on in a couple of streams, and meet in the centre ; and, when they are in their proper position, they smile.

There is nothing like the Stage peasants' smile in this world — nothing so perfectly inane, so calmly imbecile.

They are so happy. They don't look it, but we know they are, because they say so. If you don't believe them, they dance three steps to the right and three steps to the left back again. They can't help it. It is because they are so happy.

When they are more than usually rollicking, they stand in a semi-circle, with their hands on each other's shoulders, and sway from side to side trying to make themselves sick. But this is only when they are simply bursting with joy.

Stage peasants never have any work to do. Sometimes we see them going to work, sometimes coming home from work, but nobody has ever seen them actually *at* work. They could not afford to work ; it would spoil their clothes.

They are very sympathetic, are Stage peasants. They never seem to have any affairs of their own to think about, but they make up for this by taking a three hundred horse-power interest in things in which they have no earthly concern.

What particularly rouses them is the heroine's love affairs. They could listen to that all day.

They yearn to hear what she said to him, and to be told what he replied to her, and they repeat it to each other.

In our own love-sick days, we often used to go and relate to various people all the touching conversations that took place between *our* lady-love and ourselves ; but *our* friends never seemed to get excited over it. On the contrary, a casual

observer might even have been led to the idea that they were bored by our recital. And they had trains to catch, and men to meet, before we had got a quarter through the job.

Ah, how often, in those days, have we yearned for the sympathy of a Stage peasantry, who would have crowded round us, eager not to miss one word of the thrilling narrative; who would have rejoiced with us with an encouraging laugh, and have condoled with us with a grieved "Oh," and who would have gone off, when we had had enough of them, singing about it.

By the way, this is a very beautiful trait in the character of the Stage peasantry, their prompt and unquestioning compliance with the slightest wish of any of the principals.

"Leave me, friends," says the heroine, beginning to make preparations for weeping, and, before she can turn round, they are clean gone—one lot to the right, evidently making for the back entrance of the public house, and the other half to the left, where they visibly hide themselves behind the pump, and wait till somebody else wants them.

The Stage peasantry do not talk much, their strong point being to listen. When they cannot

get any more information about the state of the heroine's heart, they like to be told long and complicated stories about wrongs done years ago to people that they never heard of. They seem to be able to grasp and understand these stories with ease. This makes the audience envious of them.

When the Stage peasantry do talk, however, they soon make up for lost time. They start off altogether with a suddenness that nearly knocks you over.

They *all* talk. Nobody listens. Watch any two of them. They are both talking as hard as they can go. They have been listening quite enough to other people: you can't expect them to listen to each other. But the conversation, under such conditions, must be very trying.

And then they flirt so sweetly! so idyllicly!

It has been our privilege to see real peasantry flirt, and it has always struck us as a singularly solid and substantial affair—makes one think, somehow, of a steam roller flirting with a cow—but on the stage it is so sylph-like. *She* has short skirts, and her stockings are so much tidier and better fitting than these things are in real peasant

life ; and she is arch and coy. She turns away from him and laughs—such a silvery laugh.

And he is ruddy and curly haired, and has on such a beautiful waistcoat ! how can she help but love him ? And he is so tender and devoted, and holds her by the waist ; and she slips round and comes up the other side. Oh, it is so bewitching.

The Stage peasantry like to do their love-making as much in public as possible. Some people fancy a place all to themselves for this sort of thing—where nobody else is about. We ourselves do. But the Stage peasant is more sociably inclined. Give him the village green, just outside the public house, or the square, on market day, to do his spooning in.

They are very faithful, are Stage peasants. No jilting, no fickleness, no breach of promise. If the gentleman in pink walks out with the lady in blue in the first act, pink and blue will be married in the end. He sticks to her all through, and she sticks to him.

Girls in yellow may come and go ; girls in green may laugh and dance ; the gentleman in pink heeds them not. Blue is his colour, and he never leaves it. He stands beside it, he sits beside it.

He drinks with her, he smiles with her, he laughs with her, he dances with her, he comes on with her, he goes off with her.

When the time comes for talking, he talks to her and only her ; and she talks to him and only him. Thus there is no jealousy, no quarrelling.

But we should prefer an occasional change ourselves.

There are no married people in Stage villages, and no children (consequently, of course—happy village, oh, to discover it, and spend a month there !) There are just the same number of men as there are women in all Stage villages, and they are all about the same age, and each young man loves some young woman, but they never marry.

They talk a lot about it, but they never do it. The artful beggars ! They see too much what it's like among the principals.

The Stage peasant is fond of drinking, and, when he drinks, he likes to let you know he is drinking. None of your quiet half-pint inside the bar for him. He likes to come out in the street and sing about it, and do tricks with it, such as turning it topsy-turvy over his head.

But, notwithstanding all this, he is moderate,

mind you. You can't say he takes too much. One small jug of ale among forty is his usual allowance.

He has a keen sense of humour, and is easily amused. There is something almost pathetic about the way he goes into convulsions of laughter over such very small jokes. How a man like that would enjoy a real joke! One day he will, perhaps, hear a real joke. Who knows?

It will, however, probably kill him.

One grows to love the Stage peasant after awhile. He is so good, so childlike, so unworldly. He realises one's ideal of Christianity.

THE GOOD OLD MAN

HE has lost his wife. But he knows where she is—among the angels!

She isn't all gone, because the heroine has her hair. "Ah, you've got your mother's hair," says the good old man, feeling the girl's head all over as she kneels beside him. Then they all wipe away a tear.

The people on the stage think very highly of the good old man, but they don't encourage him much, after the first act. He generally dies in the first act.

If he does not seem likely to die, they murder him.

He is a most unfortunate old gentleman. Anything he is mixed up in seems bound to go wrong. If he is manager or director of a bank, smash it goes before even one act is over. His particular firm is always on the verge of bankruptcy. We

have only to be told that he has put all his savings into a company—no matter how sound and promising an affair it may always have been, and may still seem—to know that that company is a “gone-er.”

No power on earth can save it, after once the good old man has become a shareholder.

If we lived in Stage-land, and were asked to join any financial scheme, our first question would be: “Is the good old man in it?” If so, that would decide us.

When the good old man is a trustee for any one, he can battle against adversity much longer. He is a plucky old fellow, and, while that trust money lasts, he keeps a brave heart, and fights on boldly. It is not until he has spent the last penny of it, that he gives way.

It then flashes across the old man’s mind that his motives for having lived in luxury upon that trust money, for years, may possibly be misunderstood. The world—the hollow, heartless world—will call it a swindle, and regard him generally as a precious old fraud.

This idea quite troubles the good old man.

But the world really ought not to blame him.

No one, we are sure, could be more ready and willing to make amends (when found out); and, to put matters right, he will cheerfully sacrifice his daughter's happiness, and marry her to the villain.

The villain, by the way, has never a penny to bless himself with, and cannot even pay his own debts, let alone helping anybody else out of a scrape. But the good old man does not think of this.

Our own personal theory, based upon a careful comparison of similarities, is that the good old man is in reality the Stage hero, grown old. There is something about the good old man's chuckle-headed simplicity, about his helpless imbecility, and his irritating damtom foolishness, that is strangely suggestive of the hero.

He is just the sort of old man that we should imagine the hero *would* develop into.

We may, of course, be wrong; but that is our idea.

THE IRISHMAN

HE says : " Shure," and " Bedad," and, in moments of exultation, " Beghorra." That is all the Irish he knows.

He is very poor, but scrupulously honest. His great ambition is to pay his rent, and he is devoted to his landlord.

He is always cheerful, and always good. We never knew a bad Irishman, on the stage. Sometimes a Stage Irishman *seems* to be a bad man—such as the " agent," or the " informer"—but, in these cases, it invariably turns out, in the end, that this man was all along a Scotchman, and thus what had been a mystery becomes clear and explicable.

The Stage Irishman is always doing the most wonderful things imaginable. We do not see him do these wonderful things. He does them when nobody is by, and tells us all about them afterwards : that is how we know of them.

We remember, on one occasion, when we were young and somewhat inexperienced, planking our money down, and going into a theatre solely and purposely to see the Stage Irishman do the things he was depicted as doing on the posters outside.

They were really marvellous, the things he did on that poster.

In the right hand upper corner, he appeared, running across country on all fours, with a red herring sticking out from his coat tails, while, far behind, came hounds and horsemen, hunting him. But their chance of ever catching him up was clearly hopeless.

To the left, he was represented as running away over one of the wildest and most rugged bits of landscape we have ever seen, with a very big man on his back. Six policemen stood scattered about a mile behind him. They had evidently been running after him, but had, at last, given up the pursuit as useless.

In the centre of the poster, he was having a friendly fight with seventeen other ladies and gentlemen. Judging from the costumes, the affair appeared to be a wedding. A few of the guests

had already been killed, and lay dead about the floor. The survivors, however, were enjoying themselves immensely, and of all that gay group, he was the gayest.

At the moment chosen by the artist, he had just succeeded in cracking the bridegroom's skull.

"We must see this," said we to ourselves. "This is good." And we had a bob's worth.

But he did not do any of the things that we have mentioned, after all—at least, we mean, we did not see him do any of them. It seems he did them "off," and then came on and told his mother all about it afterwards.

He told it very well, but, somehow or other, we were disappointed. We had so reckoned on that fight.

(By-the-bye, we have noticed, even among the characters of real life, a tendency to perform most of their wonderful feats "off.")

It has been our privilege, since then, to gaze upon many posters, on which have been delineated strange and moving stage events.

We have seen the hero holding the villain up high above his head, and throwing him about that

carelessly that we have felt afraid he would break something with him.

We have seen a heroine, leaping from the roof of a house on one side of the street, and being caught by the comic man, standing on the roof of a house the other side of the street, and thinking nothing of it.

We have seen railway trains rushing into each other at the rate of sixty miles an hour. We have seen houses blown up by dynamite two hundred feet into the air. We have seen the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the destruction of Pompeii, and the return of the British Army from Egypt in one "set" each.

Such incidents as earthquakes, wrecks in mid-ocean, revolutions and battles, we take no note of; they being commonplace and ordinary.

But we do not go inside to see these things now. We have two looks at the poster instead; it is more satisfying.

The Irishman, to return to our friend, is very fond of whisky—the Stage Irishman, we mean. Whisky is for ever in his thoughts—and often in other places belonging to him, besides.

The fashion in dress among Stage Irishmen is

rather picturesque than neat. Tailors must have a hard time of it in Stage Ireland.

The Stage Irishman has also an original taste in hats. He always wears a hat without a crown ; whether to keep his head cool, or with any political significance, we cannot say.

THE DETECTIVE

AH! he is a 'cute one, *he* is.

Possibly, in real life, he would not be deemed anything extraordinary ; but, by contrast with the average of Stage men and women, any one who is not a born fool, naturally appears somewhat Machiavellian.

He is the only man, in the play, who does not swallow all the villain tells him and believe it, and come up with his mouth open for more. He is the only man who can see through the disguise of an overcoat and a new hat.

There is something very wonderful about the disguising power of cloaks and hats upon the stage. This comes from the habit people on the stage have of recognising their friends, not by their faces and voices, but by their cloaks and hats.

A married man, on the stage, knows his wife, because he knows she wears a blue ulster and a

red bonnet. The moment she leaves off that blue ulster and red bonnet, he is lost, and does not know where she is.

She puts on a yellow cloak and a green hat, and, coming in at another door, says she is a lady from the country, and does he want a housekeeper?

Having lost his beloved wife, and, feeling that there is no one now to keep the children quiet, he engages her. She puzzles him a good deal, this new housekeeper. There is something about her that strangely reminds him of his darling Nell, may be, her boots and dress, which she has not had time to change.

Sadly the slow acts pass away until one day, as it is getting near closing time, she puts on the blue ulster and the red bonnet again, and comes in at the old original door.

Then he recognises her, and asks her where she has been all these cruel years !

Even the bad people, who, as a rule, do possess a little sense—indeed, they are the only persons, in the play, who ever pretend to any—are deceived by singularly thin disguises.

The detective comes in to their secret councils, with his hat drawn down over his eyes, and, fol-

lowed by the hero, speaking in a squeaky voice ; and the villains mistake them for members of the band, and tell them all their plans.

If the villains can't get themselves found out that way, then they go into a public tea-garden, and recount their crimes to one another in a loud tone of voice.

They evidently think that it is only fair to give the detective a chance.

The detective must not be confounded with the policeman. The Stage policeman is always on the side of the villain ; the detective backs virtue.

The Stage detective is, in fact, the earthly agent of a discerning and benevolent Providence. He stands by, and allows vice to be triumphant, and the good people to be persecuted, for a while, without interference. Then when he considers that we have all had about enough of it (to which conclusion, by-the-bye, he arrives somewhat late), he comes forward, handcuffs the bad people, sorts out and gives back to the good people all their various estates and wives, promises the chief villain twenty years' penal servitude, and all is joy.

THE SAILOR

HE does suffer so with his trousers. He has to stop and pull them up about twice every minute.

One of these days, if he is not careful, there will be an accident happen to those trousers.

If the Stage sailor will follow our advice, he will be warned in time, and will get a pair of braces.

Sailors, in real life, do not have nearly so much trouble with their trousers as sailors on the stage do. Why is this? We have seen a good deal of sailors in real life, but, on only one occasion, that we can remember, did we ever see a real sailor pull his trousers up.

And then he did not do it a bit like they do it on the stage.

The Stage sailor places his right hand behind him and his left in front, leaps up into the air, kicks out his leg behind in a gay and bird-like way, and the thing is done.

The real sailor that we saw, began by saying a bad word. Then he leant up against a brick wall and undid his belt, pulled up his "bags," as he stood there (he never attempted to leap up into the air), tucked in his jersey, shook his legs, and walked on.

It was a most unpicturesque performance to watch.

The thing that the Stage sailor most craves in this life is that somebody should shiver his timbers.

"Shiver my timbers!" is the request he makes to every one he meets. But nobody ever does it.

His chief desire with regard to the other people in the play is that they should "belay there, avast!" We do not know how this is done; but the Stage sailor is a good and kindly man, and we feel convinced he would not recommend the exercise if it were not conducive to piety and health.

The Stage sailor is good to his mother, and dances the hornpipe beautifully. We have never found a real sailor who could dance a hornpipe, though we have made extensive inquiries throughout the profession. We were introduced to a ship's steward, who offered to do us a cellar-flap

for a pot of four-half ; but that was not what we wanted.

The Stage sailor is gay and rollicking ; the real sailors, we have met, have been, some of them, the most worthy and single-minded of men, but they have appeared sedate rather than gay, and they hav'n't rollicked much.

The Stage sailor seems to have an easy time of it, when at sea. The hardest work we have ever seen him do then has been folding up a rope or dusting the sides of the ship.

But it is only in his very busy moments that he has to work to this extent ; most of his time is occupied in chatting with the captain.

By the way, speaking of the sea, few things are more remarkable in their behaviour than a Stage sea. It must be difficult to navigate in a Stage sea, the currents are so confusing.

As for the waves, there is no knowing how to steer for them ; they are so tricky. At one moment they are all on the larboard, the sea on the other side of the vessel being perfectly calm, and, the next instant, they have crossed over, and are all on the starboard, and, before the captain can think how to meet this new dodge, the whole

ocean has slid round and got itself up into a heap at the back of him.

Seamanship is useless against such very unprofessional conduct as this, and the vessel is wrecked.

A wreck at (Stage) sea is a truly awful sight. The thunder and lightning never leave off for an instant ; the crew run round and round the mast and scream ; the heroine, carrying the Stage child in her arms, and with her back hair down, rushes about and gets in everybody's way. The comic man alone is calm !

The next instant, the bulwarks fall down flat on the deck, and the mast goes straight up into the sky and disappears ; then the water reaches the powder magazine, and there is a terrific explosion.

This is followed by a sound as of linen sheets being ripped up, and the passengers and crew hurry down stairs into the cabin, evidently with the idea of getting out of the way of the sea, which has climbed up, and is now level with the deck.

The next moment, the vessel separates in the middle, and goes off R. and L., so as to make room

for a small boat containing the heroine, the child, the comic man, and one sailor.

The way small boats are managed at (Stage) sea is even more wonderful than the way in which ships are sailed.

To begin with, everybody sits sideways along the middle of the boat, all facing the starboard. They do not attempt to row. One man does all the work with one scull. This scull he puts down through the water till it touches the bed of the ocean, and then he shoves.

“Deep sea punting” would be the technical term for the method, we presume.

In this way do they toil—or rather, to speak correctly, does the one man toil—through the awful night, until with joy they see before them the lighthouse rocks.

The lighthouse keeper comes out with a lantern. The boat is run in among the breakers, and all are saved!

And then the band plays.

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ON THE STAGE—AND OFF

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ON THE STAGE—AND OFF

CHAPTER I

I DETERMINE TO BECOME AN ACTOR.

THERE comes a time in every one's life when he feels he was born to be an actor. Something within him tells him that he is the coming man, and that one day he will electrify the world. Then he burns with a desire to show them how the thing's done, and to draw a salary of three hundred a week.

This sort of thing generally takes a man when he is about nineteen, and lasts till he is nearly twenty. But he doesn't know this at the time. He thinks he has got hold of an inspiration all to himself—a kind of solemn "call," which it would be wicked to disregard; and when he finds that

there are obstacles in the way of his immediate appearance as Hamlet at a leading West-end theatre, he is blighted.

I myself caught it in the usual course. I was at the theatre one evening seeing *Romeo and Juliet* played, when it suddenly flashed across me that that was my vocation. I thought all acting was making love in tights to pretty women, and I determined to devote my life to it. When I communicated my heroic resolution to my friends, they reasoned with me. That is, they called me a fool; and then said that they had always thought me a sensible fellow, though that was the first I had ever heard of it.

But I was not to be turned from my purpose.

I commenced operations by studying the great British dramatists. I was practical enough to know that some sort of preparation was necessary, and I thought that, for a beginning, I could not do better than this. Accordingly, I read through every word of Shakespeare,—with notes, which made it still more unintelligible,—Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Lord Lytton. This brought me into a state of mind bordering on insanity. Another standard

dramatist, and I should have gone raving mad : of that I feel sure. Thinking that a change would do me good, I went in for farces and burlesques, but found them more depressing than the tragedies, and the idea then began to force itself upon me that, taking one consideration with another, an actor's lot would not be a happy one. Just when I was getting most despondent, however, I came across a little book on the art of "making-up," and this resuscitated me.

I suppose the love of "making up" is inherent in the human race. I remember belonging, when a boy, to "The West London United Concert and Entertainment Association." We used to meet once a week for the purpose of regaling our relations with original songs and concertina solos, and on these occasions we regularly burnt-corked our hands and faces. There was no earthly reason for doing so, and I am even inclined to think we should have made our friends less unhappy if we had spared them this extra attraction. None of our songs had the slightest reference to Dinah. We didn't even ask each other conundrums ; while, as for the jokes, they all came from the audience. And yet we daubed ourselves black

with as much scrupulousness as if it had been some indispensable religious rite. It could only have been vanity.

"Making-up" certainly assists the actor to a very great degree. At least, I found it so in my case. I am naturally of mild and gentle appearance, and, at that time, was particularly so. It was no earthly use my standing in front of the glass and trying to rehearse the part of, say, a drunken costermonger. It was perfectly impossible for me to imagine myself the character. I am ashamed to have to confess it, but I looked more like a young curate than a drunken costermonger, or even a sober one, and the delusion could not be sustained for a moment. It was just the same when I tried to turn myself into a desperate villain; there was nothing of the desperate villain about me. I might, perhaps, have imagined myself going for a walk on Sunday, or saying "bother it," or even playing ha'penny nap, but as for ill-treating a lovely and unprotected female, or murdering my grandfather, the thing was absurd. I could not look myself in the face and do it. It was outraging every law of Lavater. My fiercest scowl was a milk-and-watery accom-

paniment to my bloodthirsty speeches; and, when I tried to smile sardonically, I merely looked imbecile.

But crape hair and the rouge pot changed all this. The character of Hamlet stood revealed to me the moment that I put on false eyebrows, and made my cheeks look hollow. With a sallow complexion, dark eyes, and long hair, I *was* Romeo, and, until I washed my face, loved Juliet to the exclusion of all my female cousins. Humour came quite natural when I had a red nose; and, with a scrubby, black beard, I felt fit for any amount of crime.

My efforts to study elocution, however, were not so successful. I had the misfortune to possess a keen sense of the ludicrous, and to have a morbid dread of appearing ridiculous. My extreme sensitiveness on this point would have been enough to prevent my ever acting well under any circumstances, and, as it was, it hampered and thwarted me at every turn: not only on the stage, but even in my own room with the door locked. I was always in a state of terror lest any one should overhear me, and half my time was taken up in listening on one side of the keyhole, to

make sure that no one was listening on the other; while the slightest creak on the stairs was sufficient to make me stop short in the middle of a passage, and commence whistling or humming in an affectedly careless manner, in order to suggest the idea that I was only amusing myself. I tried getting up early and going to Hampstead Heath, but it was no good. If I could have gone to the Desert of Sahara, and assured myself, by the aid of a powerful telescope, that no living creature was within twenty miles of me, I might have come out strong, but not else. Any confidence I might have placed in Hampstead Heath was rudely dissipated on the very second morning of my visits. Buoyed up by the belief that I was far from every vestige of the madding crowd, I had become quite reckless, and, having just delivered, with great vigour, the oration of Antony over the body of Cæsar, I was about starting on something else, when I heard a loud whisper come from some furze bushes close behind me: "Ain't it proper, Liza! Joe, you run and tell 'Melia to bring Johnny."

I did not wait for Johnny. I left that spot at the rate of six miles an hour. When I got to

Camden Town I looked behind me, cautiously. No crowd appeared to be following me, and I felt relieved, but I did not practise on Hampstead Heath again.

After about two months of this kind of thing, I was satisfied that I had learned all that could possibly be required, and that I was ready to "come out." But here the question very naturally arose, "How can I get out?" My first idea was to write to one of the leading managers, tell him frankly my ambition, and state my abilities in a modest but straightforward manner. To this, I argued, he would reply by requesting me to call upon him, and let him see for himself what I could do. I should then go to the theatre at the time appointed, and send up my card. He would ask me into his private room, and, after a little general conversation on the weather, and the latest murder, etc., etc., he would suggest my rehearsing some short scene before him, or reciting one or two speeches. This I should do in a way that would quite astonish him, and he would engage me on the spot at a small salary. I did not expect much at first, but fancied that five or six pounds per week would be near the mark. After that, the

rest would be easy. I should go on for some months, perhaps a year, without making any marked sensation. Then my opportunity would come. A new play would be produced, in which there would be some minor part, not considered of any importance, but which in my hands (I had just read the history of "Lord Dundreary," and believed every word of it) would become the great thing in the play, and the talk of London.

I should take the town by storm, make the fortune of my manager, and be the leading actor of the day. I used to dwell on the picture of the night when I should first startle the world. I could see the vast house before me with its waves of wild, excited faces. I could hear their hoarse roar of applause ringing in my ears. Again and again I bowed before them, and again and again the cheers burst forth, and my name was shouted with waving of hats and with bravos.

I did not write to a manager, though, after all. A friend who knew something about the subject said he wouldn't if he were me, and I didn't.

I asked him what course he would advise, and he said : "Go to an agent, and tell him just exactly what you want." I went to two or three agents,

and told them all just exactly what I wanted, and they were equally frank, and told me just exactly what *they* wanted, which, speaking generally, was five shillings booking fee, to begin with. To do them justice, though, I must say that none of them appeared at all anxious to have me ; neither did they hold out to me much hope of making my fortune. I believe my name is still down in the books of most of the agents—at least, I have never been round to take it off—and I expect that amongst them they will obtain for me a first-class engagement one of these days, when I am Bishop of London, or editor of a society paper, or something of that sort.

It was not for want of worrying that they did not do anything for me then. I was for ever what I called “waking them up,” a process which consisted of studying the photos in the outer office for half an hour, and then being requested to call again. I had regular days for performing this duty, on the mornings of which I would say to myself : “ Well, I must go round, and wake those agents up again to-day.” When I had said this, I felt quite important, and had some vague idea that I was over-working myself. If, on my way, I happened to

meet a friend, I greeted him with "Haven't got a minute, old man. I'm just going round to my agents," and, scarcely stopping to shake hands, would rush off, leaving him with the impression that I had been telegraphed for.

But I never succeeded in rousing them to a full sense of their responsibilities, and, after a while, we began to get mutually tired of one another; especially as about this time I managed to get hold of two or three sham agents,—or rather, they managed to get hold of me,—who were much more pleased to see me. One of these, a very promising firm (though not quite so good at performing), had its offices then in Leicester Square, and consisted of two partners, one of whom, however, was always in the country on important business, and could never be seen. I remember they got four pounds out of me, for which they undertook, in writing, to obtain me a salaried London engagement before the expiration of a month. Just when the time was nearly up, however, I received a long and sympathetic letter from the mysterious travelling partner. This hitherto rustivating individual had, it appeared, returned to town the previous day, but only to discover a state

of things that had shocked him beyond all expression. His partner, the one to whom I had paid the four pounds, besides defrauding nearly all the clients by taking money for engagements which he had no possible means of obtaining, had robbed him, the writer of the letter, of upwards of seventy pounds, and had bolted, no one knew whither. My present correspondent expressed himself deeply grieved at my having been so villainously cheated, and hoped I would join him in taking proceedings against his absconding partner—when found. He concluded by stating that four pounds was an absurd sum to charge for obtaining such an engagement as had been held out to me, and that if I would give him (who really had the means of performing his promises) two pounds, he would get me one in a week, or ten days at the outside. Would I call and see him that evening? I did not go that evening, but I went the first thing the next morning. I then found the door locked, and a notice on it that all letters were to be left with the housekeeper. Coming down stairs, I met a man coming up, and asked him if he knew where either of the partners could be found. He said that he would give a sovereign to know, and that

he was the landlord. I heard of the firm again the other day, and I believe it is still flourishing, though with the customary monthly change as to name and address. By the bye, I wonder if the agent nuisance will ever be stamped out. Perhaps, now that education is compulsory, the next generation of actors and managers may be able to look after their own affairs, and so dispense with the interference of these meddlers on commission.

CHAPTER II

I BECOME AN ACTOR.

AMONG the sham agents must be classed the "Professors," or "X.Y.Z.'s," who are always "able to place two or three" (never more than two or three; it would be no use four applying) "lady and gentleman amateurs, of tall or medium stature, either dark or fair, but *must* be of good appearance, at a leading West-end theatre, in good parts: Salaried engagement." These gentlemen are appreciative, and very quick to discern real talent. They perceived mine in a moment. They were all of them sure that I should make a splendid actor, and I was just the man they wanted. But they were conscientious. They scorned to hide the truth, and told me of my faults without reserve. They said that I was full of promise, that I had the makings of a really great actor in me, *but*—and the remarkable part

of it was that no two of them agreed as to that "but." One said it was my voice. All that I wanted was to train my voice; then I should be perfect. Another thought my voice was a very fine one, but told me that my attitudes would not do at all. When my attitudes were a little more artistic, he could get me an engagement at once. A third, after hearing me recite a trifle or two from *Macbeth*, clapped me on the shoulder, and insisted on shaking hands. There were tears almost in his eyes, and he appeared quite overcome. He said:

"My boy, you have got it in you. You are an actor! but—you want chic."

I had not got the slightest notion what he meant. I said:

"You think so."

He was sure of it. It would be impossible for me to succeed without chic: *with* chic, I should soon be famous. I determined, at any price, to get chic, and I deferentially put it to him, how he thought I could obtain it. He paused for a minute or so, evidently considering how it could be done, while I stood anxiously awaiting the result. Suddenly a bright idea seemed to strike

him. He laid his hand confidentially on my arm, and, in the impressive voice of a man who is communicating some extraordinary discovery, said :

“Come to me, twice a week, Tuesdays and Fridays, say, from eight to nine.” Then he drew back a few paces to see what effect it had upon me.

I replied that I supposed he meant he would teach it me. He seemed struck with my intelligence, and acknowledged that that was just precisely what he did mean. He explained—always in the same strictly confidential manner, as though he would not for the world have any one else know—that he had had great experience in this particular branch of dramatic education. He had letters now in his desk from well-known actors and actresses, persons of the greatest eminence, acknowledging that they owed their present position entirely to his teaching, and thanking him for all that he had done for them. He would show me those letters, and he rose to do so. But no, on second thoughts he would not ; they were written in confidence, and it would not be right for him to let others see them—not even me, whom he felt he could trust. To do him justice,

he never did show those letters, either to me, or, as far as I could learn, to any one else, though I subsequently came across three or four people who expressed an earnest desire to see them.

But I was slowly and painfully gaining experience, and I went away without leaving the five-pound note which I—"as a man of business"—ought to have seen was an absurdly small amount, his usual charge being twenty guineas; only, somehow or other, he had taken an interest in me, and felt sure I should reflect credit on his teaching, and so make it up to him in that way.

Another class that make a very good thing out of stage-struck asses, are the "managers" (?) who have vacancies for "an amateur lady and gentleman in a specially selected company." They are men who evidently believe in the literal truth of Jaques's opinion as to all men and women being players, for they put raw novices into the leading parts with a confidence as to the result that is simply touching. The Thespian aspirant, who has never acted out of his own back parlour, feels a little nervous, though, at being cast for Banquo and Colonel Damas, to open with on the following Saturday. He cannot quite make up his mind,

whether a mistake has been made, a practical joke played upon him for the amusement of the rest of the company, or whether it is that the manager is really an intelligent man, who knows ability when he sees it. He does not like to speak about it, lest it should be thought he was not confident of his own powers—a failing of which the stage tyro is not usually guilty. Besides which, the parts might be taken from him, and this he by no means desires, although, at the same time, he is perfectly sure that he could play every other character in the piece much better. I had only one experience of the sham manager—at least, of this kind of sham manager. Unfortunately, there are other kinds, as most actors know to their cost, but these I have not come to yet. No, and I wish I had never gone to them, either.

There were about half a dozen of us noodles who had answered one advertisement, and we met every night for rehearsals at a certain house in Newman Street. Three or four well-known professionals, who were then starring in the provinces, but who would join us at the beginning of the next week, were to fill the chief parts, and we were to start for Gravesend immediately after their arrival.

I had been engaged at a weekly salary of one pound fifteen shillings, and had been cast for the parts of Gilbert Featherstone in *Lost in London*, and the King in *Hamlet*. Everything went smoothly: there had been no suggestion of a premium or anything of that kind; and although I had, by this time, grown exceedingly suspicious, I began to think that this, at all events, was not a swindle. But I soon found out the trick. On the fifth night of the rehearsals, our manager was particularly pleasant, and complimented me on what he called my really original reading of the parts. During the pauses, he leant familiarly on my shoulder, and discussed the piece with me. We had a little argument about the part of the King. He differed from me, at first, on one or two points, but afterwards came round to my views, and admitted that I was right. Then he asked me how I was going to dress the part. I had thought of this, even before I had studied the words, so I was as pat as could be on the subject, and we went through all the details, and arranged for a very gorgeous costume, indeed. He did not try to stint me in the least, though I was once or twice afraid he might grumble at the cost. But

no, he seemed quite as anxious as I was that the thing should be done in good style. It would be a little expensive, as he himself said, but then, "you may just as well do the thing properly, while you are about it," he added, and I agreed with him. He went on to reckon up the amount. He said that he could get the things very cheap—much cheaper than any one else, as he had a friend in the business, who would let him have them for exactly what they cost to make. I congratulated him on the fact, but, feeling no personal interest in the matter, began to be rather bored by his impressiveness on the subject. After adding it all up, he came to the conclusion that nine pounds ought to cover the lot.

"And very cheap too," said he; "the things will be good, and will always come in useful;" and I agreed with him again, and remarked that I thought they would be well worth the money; but wondered what on earth all this had got to do with me.

Then he wanted to know whether I would pay the money that evening, or bring it with me next time.

"Me! me pay!" I exclaimed, rendered ungrammatical by surprise. "What for?"

“What for! Why, for the costume,” replied he; “you can’t play the part without, and if you got the things yourself, you’d have to pay about four pounds more, that’s all. If you haven’t got all the money handy,” he continued soothingly, “let me have as much as you can, you know, and I’ll try and get my friend to trust you for the rest.”

On subsequent inquiry among the others I found that three of them had already let him have about five pounds each, and that a fourth intended to hand him over four pounds ten the following night. I and another agreed to wait and see. We did not see much, however. We never saw the well-known professionals, and, after the next evening, we never saw our manager again. Those who had paid saw less.

I now thought I would try hunting for myself, without the aid of agents or advertisements. I might be more successful, and certainly could not be less. The same friend that had recommended me not to write to the managers, concurred with me in this view, and thought I could not do better than drop in occasionally at “The Occidental”; and I accordingly so dropt in. I suppose there

is no actor who does not know "The Occidental," though it does try to hide itself down a dark court, being, no doubt, of a retiring disposition, like the rest of the profession.

I found the company there genial and pleasant, and without any objection to drinking at my expense. When, however, I hinted my wish to join the profession, they regarded me with a look of the most profound pity, and seemed really quite concerned. They shook their heads gravely, told me their own experiences, and did all they could to dissuade me from my intention. But I looked upon them as selfish fellows who wanted to keep young talent from the stage. Even if their advice were given honestly, I argued, it was no use taking any notice of it. Every one thinks his own calling the worst, and if a man waited to enter a profession until those already in it recommended him to, he might sit and twiddle his thumbs for the rest of his life. So I paid no attention to their warning, but continued in my course, and, at length, found some one to help me.

He was a large, flabby-looking individual, who seemed to live on Scotch whisky and big cigars, and was never either drunk or sober. He did not

smell refreshing—a fact he made all the more impressive by breathing very hard, right into one's face, while talking. He had formerly been a country manager, but how he earned his livelihood now, was always a mystery to me, as, although he rented a dirty little back room in a street leading out of the Strand, and called it his office, he never did anything there but go to sleep. He was, however, well known to the theatrical frequenters of "The Occidental,"—better known than respected, as I afterwards learnt,—while he himself knew everybody, and it appeared to me that he was just the very man I wanted. At first, he was not any more enthusiastic than the others, but my mentioning that I was prepared to pay a small premium in order to obtain an appearance, set him pondering, and, in the end, he didn't see why it could not be done. When I stated the figure I was ready to give, he grew more hopeful still, and came to the conclusion that it *could* be done. He did not even see why I should not make a big name, if I only left myself entirely in his hands.

"I have done the same thing for other people," said he, "and I can for you, if I like. There is

——,” he went on, getting talkative all at once, “he is drawing his eighty pounds a week now. Well, damn it all, sir, I made that man—made him. He’d never have been anything more than a third-rate provincial actor, if it hadn’t been for me. Then look at ——, at the ——, I knew him when he was having twenty-two shillings a week for responsibles, with old Joe Clamp, and that only when he could get it, mind you. I brought him up to London, started him at the Surrey, took him on to the West-end, and worked him up to what he is. And now, when he passes me in his brougham, he don’t know me,” and my new-found friend heaved a sigh, and took another pull to drown his grief at the ingratitude of human nature.

“Yes, sir,” he continued, on emerging from his glass, “I made those men, and why shouldn’t I make you?”

As I could not show any reason for his not doing so, he determined that he would ; although he supposed that I should turn out just the same as the rest of them, and forget him, when I was at the top of the tree. But I assured him most solemnly that I would not, and that I should be just as

pleased to see him, when I was a great man, as I was then, and I shook hands warmly with him, as a token of how pleased I was to see him then ; for I felt really grateful to him for the favours he was going to bestow on me, and I was quite vexed that he should think I might prove ungrateful, and neglect him.

When I saw him the next day, he told me he had done it. He had arranged an engagement for me with a Surrey-side manager, to whom he would introduce me to-morrow, when the agreement could be signed, and everything settled. I was, accordingly, to be at his office for the purpose at eleven o'clock the following morning—and to bring the money with me. That was his parting injunction.

I did not walk back to my lodgings, I skipped back. I burst open the door, and went up the stairs like a whirlwind ; but I was too excited to stop indoors. I went and had dinner at a first-class restaurant, the bill for which considerably lessened my slender means. "Never mind," I thought, "what are a few shillings, when I shall soon be earning my hundreds of pounds." I went to the theatre, but I don't know what theatre it

was, or what was the play, and I don't think I knew at the time. I did notice the acting a little, but only to fancy how much better I could play each part myself. I wondered how I should like these particular actors and actresses, when I came to know them. I thought I should rather like the leading lady, and, in my imagination, sketched out the details of a most desperate flirtation with her, that would send all the other actors mad with jealousy. Then I went home to bed, and lay awake all night, dreaming.

I got up at seven the next morning, and hurried over my breakfast, so as to be in time for the appointment at eleven. I think I looked at my watch (I wonder where that watch is, now!) at least every other minute. I got down to the Strand a little before ten, and wandered up and down a small portion of it, frightened to go a stone's throw from the office, and yet dreading to go too near it. I bought a new pair of gloves. I remember they were salmon colour, and one of them split as I was trying to get it on, so I carried it crumpled up in my hand, and wore the other one. When it got within twenty minutes of the time I turned into the street where the office was,

and loitered about there, with an uncomfortable feeling that every one living in it knew what I had come about, and was covertly watching me from behind blinds and curtains. It seemed as though eleven o'clock never would come, but Big Ben tolled it out at last, and I walked to the door, trying to look as if I had just strolled up.

When I reached the office, no one was there, and the door was locked. My heart sank within me. Had the whole thing been a cruel hoax? Was it to be another disappointment? Had the manager been murdered? Had the theatre been burned down? Why were they not here? Something extraordinary must have happened to make them late on such an important occasion as this. I spent half an hour of intense suspense, and then they arrived. They hoped they had not kept me waiting, and I replied, "Oh no, not at all," and murmured something about having only just come myself.

As soon as we all three were inside the little office, I was introduced to the manager, who turned out to be an actor I had often seen on the boards, but who did not look a bit like himself, though he would have done very well for his own

son ; he was so much shorter and younger than he ought to have been. The clean-shaven face gives actors such a youthful appearance. It was difficult to believe, at first, that the sedate-looking boys I used to meet at rehearsal, were middle-aged men with families, some of them.

Altogether, my future manager did not realise my expectations of him. He was not dressed with that reckless disregard for expense, that I had looked for in a man of his position. To tell the truth, he presented a very seedy figure indeed. I put it down, however, to that contempt for outward appearance, so often manifested by men of great wealth, and called to mind stories of millionaires who had gone about almost in rags ; and I remembered, too, how I had once seen the mother of one of our leading burlesque actresses, and how I had been surprised at her extreme dinginess—the mother's.

They had the agreements all ready, and the manager and I signed in each other's presence, and exchanged. Then I handed him a ten-pound bank note, and he gave me a receipt for it. Everything was strictly formal. The agreement, especially, was very plain and precise, and there could

be no mistake about it. It arranged for me to give my services for the first month gratis, and after that I was to receive a *salary according to ability*. This seemed to me very fair, indeed. If anything, it was, perhaps, a little reckless on his part, and might press heavily upon him. He told me candidly, however, that he did not think I should be worth more than thirty shillings a week to him for the first two or three months, though, of course, it would depend upon myself entirely, and he should be only too pleased if it proved otherwise. I held a different opinion on the subject, but did not mention it, thinking it would be better to wait and let time prove it. So I merely said I wished for nothing but what was fair and just, and it appearing that this was exactly what he wanted me to have, we parted on the best of terms: but not before all particulars had been arranged. He was going to open for the summer season in three weeks' time, and the rehearsals were to commence about a fortnight before. For the next week, therefore, I was nothing; after that, I was an Actor!!! *

* My friends deny this. They say I never became an actor. I say I did, and I think I ought to know.

CHAPTER III

THROUGH THE STAGE DOOR

IT was not until about a week before the opening night, that I received a summons to attend at the theatre. Eleven o'clock was the time appointed for "the company to assemble on the stage," and, accordingly, at a few minutes before that hour, I stood in front of the stage door.

It was a dingy-looking place, up a back street, with a barber's shop on one side, and a coal shed on the other. A glorious spring sunshine made it look, by contrast, still more uninviting, and I likened it to the entrance to the enchanted palace in the fairy tales, where the gloomier the portal through which the prince passes, the more gorgeous the halls beyond. This was before I had seen the inside.

But it wouldn't do for me to stop there meditating. It was already two minutes past eleven,

and the rest of the company would be waiting for me. I laid my hand upon the latch, and—

A moment, please. Before I throw open that door, and let daylight in upon the little world behind, let me offer a word or two of preparatory explanation.

The theatrical world is a big world. From one of the leading London theatres to a travelling booth (I intend no slighting allusion to our talented American cousin) is a wide stretch, and embraces a great variety. My experience was confined to three or four of these varieties, and by no means extended to the whole. My short career was passed among the minor London theatres, and second and third rate travelling companies ; and it is of these, and these only, that I shall speak. But of these—of what came under my actual observation, that is—I shall speak freely, endeavouring to record things exactly as I found them—nothing extenuating, nor setting down aught in malice. It may be that, in the course of my comments, I shall think it necessary to make a few more or less sensible and original remarks ; to tell actors and actresses what they ought to do, and what they ought not to do ; to explain to managers how they

ought to manage their own business ; and to give good advice generally all round. Therefore, at the outset, I wish it to be clearly understood that, when so doing, I have in mind only that part of the theatrical world with which I am acquainted. As regards such theatres as, for example, the Lyceum or the St James's, they are managed quite as well, perhaps, as I could manage them myself, and I have no fault to find with them. Even if I had, I should not do so here, for in these reminiscences I intend to talk only about what I understand—an eccentric resolution for an author, I admit ; but no matter, I like to be original, now and then. With this understanding, we will push back the door and enter.

I found a wheezy little old man inside, boxed up behind a glass partition, toasting a bloater before a small fire. On that morning, I felt kindly disposed towards all living things, and I therefore spoke kindly, even to this poor old buffer. I said ·

“ Good morning. It's a fine day.”

He said, “ Shut the door, can't yer ; or else get outside.”

Acting on this suggestion, I shut the door, and then stood leaning against it, while he finished

toasting the bloater. When I saw that this operation was completed, I had another try at him. I remarked that my name was ——. Of course, I had assumed a stage name. They all do it. Heaven only knows why ; I am sure *they* don't. While in the profession, I met a young fellow whose real name happened to be the very one that I had assumed, while he had taken my real name for his assumed one. We were both happy and contented enough, until we met ; but afterwards, we took a sadder view of life, with all its shams and vanities.

As the mere announcement of my name had no visible effect upon the stage-door keeper—for such I found him to be—I fired my last shot, and told him I was an actor. It roused him. It electrified him to such a degree, that he took his gaze off the bloater, and looked at me. Having feasted his eyes upon me to his full satisfaction, he said, “Down the yard,” and returned to what, I suppose, was his breakfast ; there being a dismal, just got-up sort of look about him.

Gathering from this, that there was a yard somewhere in the neighbourhood, and that, when I had found it, I was to go down it, I started off to look

for it. I discovered it at last, quite unexpectedly, by the process of stumbling over a friendly cat, and bursting open a door with my head. The moment I got into it, I was surrounded by at least half a dozen of the feline species. They looked hungry, and welcomed me with enthusiasm, under an absurd idea that I was the cat's-meat man, whom I did not resemble in the least. Cats are kept at theatres to keep away the rats, but sometimes the cats themselves become so numerous, as to be rather more of a nuisance than the rats, and then it is necessary to keep some one to keep away the cats. They take a great interest in the drama, these cats. They always make a point of coming on in the middle of the most pathetic scenes, when they take the centre of the stage, and proceed to go through one or other of their decidedly peculiar toilet exercises.

Going down the yard, as directed, and groping my way through a dark passage at the end, I found myself in a vast, gloomy vault, full of hollow echoes, and strange, shapeless shadows; at least, that is what it seemed to me.

I cannot say, now, what notions I had previously formed of "behind the scenes." They were dis-

pelled so rudely and suddenly, that all trace of them is lost. I know they were formed; partly by Dower Wilson's charming sketches, where fairy damsels (in the costume of their country) lean gracefully against the back of the landscapes, with their pretty legs crossed; partly by the descriptions of friends who said they had been there; and partly from my own imagination—a vivid one. The reality, however, exceeded my wildest expectations. I could never have dreamt of anything so utterly dismal, as an empty theatre by daylight, or rather day-darkness. No, not even after a supper of beefsteaks and porter.

At first, I could see nothing; but, after a while, I got used to the dimness, and was able to look about me. The decorations of the place (such as they were—such as might be expected in a theatre where the stalls were three shillings, and the gallery fourpence) were shrouded in dirty white cloths. The music stools and stands in the orchestra, together with the big drum, and the violoncello in a green baize case, were all in a heap in the corner, as if they had had a performance on their own account during the night, and had ended up by getting drunk. This idea was further suggested

by the appearance of the gallery bar, which could be seen from the stage, though it looked about half a mile off, and which was crowded with empty bottles and dirty pewter pots and glasses. Shabby, patched scenery—a mere unintelligible daub, seen close to—was littered all round me; propped up against the great wooden beams which supported the flies, or against the side walls; piled up at the back, in what was called the “scene dock”; lying down flat at my feet; or hanging suspended over my head. In the centre of the stage was a rickety table, and on the table was a candle, stuck in a ginger-beer bottle. A solitary sunbeam, having sneaked in through some odd crevice, threw a band of light across the gloom, and showed up the dust, of which the place seemed full. A woman, with a noisy cold in her head, was sweeping out the pit; and some unseen animal, which I judged to be a small boy, by the noise it made, was performing a shrill whistle somewhere in the region of the dress circle. The roar from the street sounded dull and muffled, but the banging of a door, or the falling of a chair within the building, made such a noise, that the spiders ran into their holes for fright.

CHAPTER IV

BEHIND THE SCENES

I HAD the stage all to myself for about half an hour. It is the etiquette of the theatre for every one to be late. You estimate the position of an actor, by the time he is late for rehearsal. If he (I don't say a word about ladies: they are always an hour late for everything, bless 'em) is twenty minutes behind, he is most likely mere utility. If a man keeps everybody waiting an hour and a half, you may put him down as a star.

I occupied the time pleasantly enough in wandering about, and finding out all I could. I climbed up a shaky wooden staircase to the "flies," and looked down upon the stage from a height of fifty feet. I scrambled about up there amidst ladders, and small platforms, and ropes, and pulleys, and windlasses, and gas pipes, and empty gas bags, and beer cans, and darkness, and dust.

Then, up another ladder, leading higher still, and along a narrow plank, crossing from one side of the stage to the other, over a perfect hanging forest of scenery.

Clambering round behind, I came to the scene-painting room. It was a long, narrow sort of loft, forty feet above the stage. One side of it was of canvas—part of an enormous sheet, which passed right through it, in at the top and out at the bottom. This sheet of canvas, on which a scene was being painted, was suspended from the roof of the theatre by means of pulleys, so that the whole could be raised or lowered at pleasure, and every portion of it brought within reach of the scene-painter, without his moving.

If I have not explained myself clearly, try this : Take your wife's best travelling trunk (choosing a time when she is not at home), wrench the cover off, and then hold the box up against the window blind, in such a position that the blind is where the cover would have been. There you have it. The box is the scene-painter's room—the blind, the scene.

There was plenty of light and colour (the latter in buckets) in the room, but very little else. A

long, deal table, crowded with brushes and paint pots, ran nearly the whole length of it. The scene-painter's palette, a marble slab about six feet square, lay on the floor, and near it, one of the brushes with which the sky had been laid on. This brush was the size of an ordinary carpet broom. Noting these things, I left the studio, and descended.

A little lower down was the wardrobe room. There was not much in it though. Dresses are borrowed as they are wanted, now, from the costumiers round Covent Garden and Drury Lane ; everything being found for so much a week. Years ago, I believe, each theatre used to make, and keep, its own costumes. Even now, a few old-fashioned provincial houses have a substantial wardrobe attached to them, but these are the exceptions, and, as a rule, little, if anything, is kept in stock. Here, there were a few pairs of very loose and baggy-looking tights, half a dozen rusty tin helmets, a heap of buff shoes in a corner—half of them right, half left, sort 'em as you want 'em—some natty waistcoats—red and blue, with a dash of yellow ; the sort of thing stage Yorkshiremen wear when they come to London, black cloaks

for any one who might wish to dissemble, and an assortment of spangled things. These were the principal items, all of which had seen their best days.

Between the yard and the stage was a very big room, containing so heterogeneous a collection of articles that, at first, I fancied it must be a co-operative store in connection with the theatre. It was, however, only the property room, the things therein being properties, or, more commonly "props," so called, I believe, because they help to support the drama. I will give you some of the contents of the room haphazard as I recollect them. There was a goodly number of tin cups, painted black up to within half an inch of the rim, so as to give them the appearance of being always full. It is from these vessels that the happy peasantry carouses, and the comic army gets helplessly fuddled. There is a universality about them. They are the one touch of (stage) nature which makes the whole world kin. They are used alike by the Esquimaux and the Hottentot. The Roman soldiery appear never to have drunk out of anything else; while, without them, the French Revolution would lose its chief characteristic. Besides

these common cups, there were gold and silver ones, used only for banquets, and high-class suicides. There were bottles, and glasses, and jugs, and decanters. From these aids to debauchery, it was pleasant to turn to a cozy-looking tea service on a tray with a white table-cloth; there was a soothing suggestion of muffins and domestic bliss about it. There was plenty of furniture, a couple of tables, a bedstead, a dresser, a sofa, chairs—half a dozen of them, high-backed ones, for “hall in the old Grange,” etc.: they were made by fixing paste-board backs on to ordinary cane chairs. The result was that they were top heavy, and went over at the slightest touch; so that picking them up, and trying to make them stand, formed the chief business of the scenes in which they were used.

I remember the first time our light comedy attempted to sit down on one of these chairs. It was on the opening night. He had just said something funny, and, having said it, sat down, crossed his legs, and threw himself back, with all that easy, negligent grace so peculiarly his own. Legs were the only things that could be seen for the next few minutes.

Other “props” were, a throne, gorgeous in gilt

paper and glazed calico ; a fire-grate, stuffed with red tinfoil ; a mirror, made with silver paper ; a bunch of jailor's keys ; handcuffs ; leg irons ; flat irons ; rifles ; brooms ; bayonets ; picks and crow-bars for the virtuously infuriated populace ; clay pipes ; daggers made of wood ; stage broadswords—there is no need to describe these, everybody knows them ; they are like nothing else on earth—battle axes ; candlesticks ; a pound or two of short dips ; a crown, set with diamonds and rubies each as big as a duck's egg ; a cradle—empty, an affecting sight ; carpets, kettles, and pots ; a stretcher ; a chariot ; a bunch of carrots ; a costermonger's barrow ; banners ; a leg of mutton, and a baby. Everything, in short, that could possibly be wanted, either in a palace or a garret, a farm-yard or a battlefield.

Still wandering about, I came across a hole in the floor at the side of the stage, and groped my way down a ladder to the region beneath, where the fairies come from, and the demons go to. It was perfectly dark, and I could see nothing. It smelt very mouldy, and seemed to be full of cunning contrivances for barking your shins. After bumping myself about a good deal there, I was

glad to find my way out again, deferring all further investigations to some future period, with a candle.

On emerging, I saw that the company had at last begun to arrive. A tall, solemn-looking man was pacing the stage, and him I greeted. He was the stage manager, and so of course rather surly. I don't know why stage managers are always surly, but they are.

In the course of the next few minutes, there trotted in a demure-looking little man, who turned out to be our "first low comedy," and very good low comedy he was, too, though, from his wooden expression, you might have thought him as destitute of humour as the librettist of a comic opera. Then followed the heavy man, talking in a very gruff voice to a good-looking young fellow with him, who played the juveniles when our manager didn't take them himself. Then, after a short interval, a lady—an old queer-looking little lady, who walked with a stick, and complained of rheumatism, and who, as soon as she reached the stage, plumped herself down on the thick end of a mossy bank, from which nothing would induce her to rise until she got up to go home. She was our "old

woman." She did the doting mothers and the comic old maids. She had played everything in her time, and could play anything still. She would have taken Juliet or Juliet's nurse, whichever you liked, and have done both of them well. She would have been ten minutes making up for Juliet, and then, sitting in the middle of the pit, you would have put her down for twenty.

The next to appear was a gentleman ("walking") in a fur-trimmed overcoat, patent-leather boots and white gaiters and lavender kid gloves. He carried a silver-headed cane in his hand, a glass in his left eye, a cigar in his mouth (put out as soon as he got to the stage of course), and a small nosegay in his button-hole. His salary I subsequently discovered to be thirty shillings a week. After him came two ladies (not with any designs upon the young man: merely in the order of time). One of them was thin and pale, with a careworn look underneath the rouge, just as if she were some poor, hard-worked woman, with a large family and small means, instead of an actress. The other was fat, fair, and—forty, if she was a day. She was gorgeously "got up," both as regards complexion and dress. I can't describe the

latter, because I never can tell what any woman has got on. I only know she conveyed an impression to my mind of being stuck out all round, and thrown out in front, and puffed out at the back, and towering up at the top, and trailing away behind, and all to such a degree, that she looked four times her natural size. As everybody was very glad indeed to see her, and welcomed her with what seemed to be irrepressible joy, even the stage manager being civil, I naturally concluded that she was the embodiment of all the virtues known to human kind. The whispered remarks that I overheard, however, did not quite support this view, and I was at a loss to reconcile matters, until I learned that she was the manager's wife. She was the leading lady, and the characters she particularly affected, and in which she was affected, were the girlish heroines, and the children who die young and go to heaven.

The rest of the company was made up of a couple of very old men, and a middle-aged stout one, two rather pretty girls, evidently possessed of an inexhaustible fund of humour, for they kept each other giggling all the morning; and the manager himself, who arrived last, and was less

interested in the proceedings than any one else. No one took the slightest notice of me, though I purposely stood about in conspicuous positions, and I felt like the new boy at school.

When everybody had arrived, the rickety table was brought down to the front, and a bell rung ; whereupon a small boy suddenly appeared for the first time, and was given the " parts " to distribute. It was a manuscript play, though well known to the company, nearly all of whom had played in it plenty of times before. All the parts were torn and greasy, except one, which was prominently clean. When the boy came to that one, he seemed puzzled, not knowing to whom it belonged ; so he stood in the centre of the stage, and bawled out the name on it ; and as it was my name, and I had to claim the part, I was at once lifted out of my obscurity, and placed in an opposite extreme hardly more comfortable.

CHAPTER V

A REHEARSAL

I HURRIEDLY unfolded the paper, to see what kind of a part I had got. I was anxious to begin studying it immediately. I had to form my conception of the character, learn the words and business, and get up gesture and expression, all in one week. No time was therefore to be lost. I give the part *in extenso* :

Joe Junks

Act I., Scene I.

_____ comes home.

It's a rough night.

_____ if he does.

Ay. Ay.

_____ stand back.

(*Together*) 'Tis he!

Fall down as scene closes in.

Act IV., scene 2.

On with rioters.

I was of a sanguine disposition at that time, but I didn't exactly see how I was going to make much of a sensation with *that*. It seemed to me that my talents were being thrown away. An ordinary actor would have done for a part like that. However, if they chose to waste me, it was more their misfortune than mine. I would say nothing, but do the best I could with the thing, and throw as much feeling into the character as it would hold. In truth, I ought to have been very proud of the part, for I found out later on that it had been written specially for me by the manager. Our low comedy, who knew the whole piece by heart, told me this. Then he added musingly, "A very good idea, too, of the boss's. I always said the first act wanted strengthening."

At last, everybody having been supplied with his or her part, and the leader of the band having arrived, the rehearsal really commenced. The play was one of the regular old-fashioned melodramas, and the orchestra had all its work cut out to keep up with it. Nearly all the performers had a bar

of music to bring them on each time, and another to take them off; a bar when they sat down, and a bar when they got up again; while it took a small overture to get them across the stage. As for the leading lady, every mortal thing she did or said, from remarking that the snow was cold, in the first act, to fancying she saw her mother and then dying, in the last, was preceded by a regular concert. I firmly believe that if, while on the stage, she had shown signs of wanting to sneeze, the band would at once have struck up quick music. I began to think, after a while, that it must be an opera, and to be afraid that I should have to sing my part.

The first scene was between the old landlord of an old inn, some village gossips, and the villain of the piece. The stage manager (who played the villain—naturally) stood in the centre of the stage, from which the rest of the company had retired, and, from there, with the manuscript in his hand, he directed the proceedings.

“Now then, gentlemen,” cried he, “first scene, please. Hallet, landlord, Bilikins, and Junks” (I was Junks), “up stage, right. I shall be here” (walking across and stamping his foot on the spot

intended), "sitting at table. All discovered at rise of curtain. You" (turning and speaking to me, about whom he had evidently been instructed), "you, Mr L., will be sitting at the end, smoking a pipe. Take up your cues sharply, and mind you speak up, or nobody will hear you: this is a big house. What are you going to give us for an overture, Mr P.?" (I call the leader of the band Mr P.). "Can you give us something old English, just before we ring up? Thanks, do—has a good effect. Now then, please, we will begin. Very piano all through this scene, Mr P., until near the end. I'll tell you where, when we come to it."

Then, reading from our parts, we commenced. The speeches, with the exception of the very short ones, were not given at full length. The last two or three words, forming the cues, were clearly spoken, but the rest was, as a rule, mumbled through, skipped altogether, or else represented by a droning "er, er, er," interspersed with occasional disjointed phrases. A scene of any length, between only two or three of the characters,—and there were many such,—was cut out entirely, and gone through apart by the people concerned.

Thus, while the main rehearsal was proceeding in the centre of the stage, a minor one was generally going on at the same time in some quiet corner—two men fighting a duel with walking sticks; a father denouncing his son, and turning him out of doors; or some dashing young gallant, in a big check ulster, making love to some sweet young damsel, whose little boy, aged seven, was sitting on her lap.

I waited eagerly for my cue, not knowing when it was coming, and, in my anxiety, made two or three false starts. I was put out of any doubt about it, when the time really did come, by a friendly nod from the gentleman who represented the landlord, and thereupon I made my observation as to the dreadful state of the weather in a loud, clear, and distinct voice, as it seemed to me. As, however, nobody appeared to have heard me, and as they were evidently waiting for me, I repeated the information in a louder, clearer, and more distinct voice, if possible; after which the stage manager spoke and said:

“Now then, Mr L., come along, let’s have it.”

I explained to him that he had already had it, and he then replied, “Oh, that will never do at

all. You must speak up more than that. Why, even *we* couldn't hear you on the stage. Bawl it out. Remember this is a large place ; you're not playing in a back drawing-room now."

I thought it was impossible for me to speak louder than I had, without doing myself some serious injury, and I began to pity the gallery boys. Any one never having attempted to speak in a large public building would hardly imagine how weak and insignificant the ordinary conversational tones are, even at their loudest. To make your voice "carry," you have to *throw* it out, instead of letting it crawl out when you open your mouth. The art is easily acquired, and, by it, you are able to make your very whispers heard.

I was cautioned to look to this, and then we went on. The close of the scene was a bustling one, and the stage manager explained it thus :

"You" (the landlord) "put the lantern close to my face, when you say, 'Tis he!' I spring up, throwing down the table" (a stamp here, to emphasise this). "I knock you down. You two try to seize me ; I break from you, and throw you down, and cross centre" (doing so). "I gain door, open it, and stand there, pointing revolver. You all

cower down.” We were squatting on our toes, as an acknowledgment of having been all bowled over like a set of nine-pins—or rather four-pins in our case—and we now further bobbed our heads, to show that we did cower.

“Picture,” says the stage manager approvingly, as drop falls. “Hurried music all through that, Mr P. Mind you all keep well up the stage” (“up” the stage means towards the back, and “down” the stage, consequently, implies near the footlights) “so as to let the drop come down. What front drops have you got? Have you got an interior? We want a cottage interior.” This latter was spoken to a stage carpenter, who was dragging some flat about. Do not be shocked, gentle reader; a stage flat is a piece of scenery. No other kind of flat is even seen on the stage.

“I dunno,” answered the man. “Where’s Jim? Jim!”

It appeared that Jim had just stepped outside for a minute. He came back at that point, however, wiping his mouth, and greatly indignant at hearing the sound of his own name.

“All right, all right,” was his wrathful comment, as he came up the yard; “don’t sing it; he ain’t

dead. What the devil's the matter? Is the 'ouse a-fire? *You* never go out, do yer!"

Jim was the head carpenter, and was a sulky and disagreeable man, even for a stage carpenter. When he wasn't "just stepped outside for a minute," he was quarrelling inside, so that instead of anybody's objecting to his frequent temporary retirements, his absence was rather welcomed. He, in common with all stage carpenters, held actors and actresses in the greatest contempt, as people who were always in the way, and without whom the play would get on much better. The chief charm about him, however, was his dense stupidity. This trait was always brought into particular prominence whenever the question of arranging scenery was under discussion.

Fresh scenery is a very great rarity at the minor theatres. When anything very special is produced, and an unusually long run is expected, say, of a month or six weeks, one or two scenes may, perhaps, be specially painted, but, as a rule, reliance is placed upon the scenery, the gradual growth of years, already in stock, which, with a little alteration, and a good deal of make-shift, generally does duty for the "entirely new and

elaborate scenery" so minutely described in the posters. Of course, under these circumstances, slight inconsistencies must be put up with. Nobody objects to a library drop representing "'tween decks of the *Sarah Jane*," or to a back parlour being called a banqueting hall. This is to be expected. Our stage manager was not a narrow-minded man on the subject of accessories. He would have said nothing about such things as these. He himself had, on the occasion of one of his benefits, played *Hamlet* with nothing but one "interior" and "a garden," and he had been a member of a fit-up company that travelled with a complete Shaksperian *répertoire* and four set scenes ; so that he was not likely to be too exacting. But even *he* used to be staggered at Jim's ideas of mounting. Jim's notion of a "distant view of Hampstead Heath by moonlight," was either a tropical island, or the backing of an old transformation scene ; and for any place in London—no matter what, whether Whitechapel or St James's Park—he invariably suggested a highly realistic representation of Waterloo Bridge in a snow-storm.

In the present instance, on being asked for the cottage interior, he let down a log cabin, with a

couple of bowie knives and revolvers artistically arranged over the fire-place; anticipating any doubt upon the subject of suitableness by an assurance that, there you were, and you couldn't do better than that. The objection that a log cabin with bowie knives and revolvers over the fire-place, though it was doubtless a common enough object in the Australian bush or the backwoods of America, was never, by any chance, found in England, and that the cottage to be represented was supposed to be within a few miles of London, he considered as too frivolous to need comment, and passed it over in silent contempt. Further argument had the effect of raising up Jim's stock authority, a certain former lessee, who had been dead these fifteen years, and about whom nobody else but Jim seemed to have the faintest recollection. It appeared that this gentleman had always used the log cabin scene for English cottages, and Jim guessed that *he* (the defunct lessee) knew what he was about, even if he (Jim) was a fool. The latter of Jim's suppositions had never been disputed, and it was a little too late then to discuss the former. All I can say is, that if Jim's Mr Harris—as this mysterious manager was generally

dubbed—really did mount his productions in the manner affirmed, their effect must have been novel in the extreme.

Nothing could induce Jim to shew anything else that morning, although the manager reminded him of a cottage scene having been expressly painted for the last lessee. Jim didn't know where it was. Besides, one of the ropes was broken, and it couldn't be got at then. After which little brush with the enemy, he walked away, and took up a row with the gas man at the very point where he had dropped it twenty minutes before.

Scenery and props were not being used at this, the first, rehearsal, the chief object of which was merely to arrange music, entrances and exits, and general business ; but of course it was desirable to know as soon as possible what scenery was available, and whether it required any altering or repairing.

In the second scene, the leading lady made her first appearance, an event which called forth all the energies of the orchestra. It would not do for her to burst upon the audience all at once. Great and sudden joy is dangerous. They must be gradually prepared for it. Care was exercised that the crisis should be well led up to, and that

she should appear exactly at the right moment. When all was satisfactorily settled, the cue was announced to her by the stage manager. He said it was, "Pom-pom—pom-pom—pom-pom—pom—POM—POM."

"That's your cue, my dear."

On the stage, everybody calls the actresses, "My dear." You soon pick it up, especially in the case of the young and pretty ones.

"Where do I come on from?" asked the leading lady.

"I can't say, my dear, until I've seen the drop. There'll most likely be a door in it, and then you can come on from the back.

Entrances from the back, it may be remarked, are the favourite ones. Indeed, some artists will never come on from anywhere else. Of course, you make a much better impression on an audience, as regards first appearance, by facing them on your entrance and walking straight down towards them, than by coming on sideways and then turning round. Entrances from the back, however, are sometimes carried to excess, and a whole scene is rendered unnatural and absurd, merely to gratify personal vanity.

I will finish what I have to say about this rehearsal by giving a verbatim report of a small part of it; viz., the fourth scene of the first act. The actual scene is this:

STAGE MANAGER, *standing CENTRE with his back to the footlights. Close behind him, perched in a high chair, the LEADER OF THE BAND solus, representing the orchestra with a fiddle. Two or three groups of artists, chatting at the wings. THE HEAVY MAN, pacing up and down at the back, conning his part in an undertone, and occasionally stopping to suit the action to the word. LOW COMEDY and WALKING GENT., going through scene by themselves in L. 3. E. SINGING CHAMBERMAID, flirting with JUVENILES (only one of them), R. 2. E. PROPERTY MAN, behind, making a veal and ham pie out of an old piece of canvas and a handful of shavings. COUPLE OF CARPENTERS, in white jackets, hovering about, with hammers in their hands, and mischief in their eyes, evidently on the look-out for an excuse to make a noise. CALL BOY, all over the place, and always in the way—except when wanted.*

OUR FIRST OLD MAN (*standing R. C., and reading his part by the aid of a large pair of specs*).

“‘Er-er — wind howls—er-er-er — night as this, fifteen years ago—er—sweet child—er-r-r—stolen away—er-r-r—baby prattle—er-ears—er-r—shall I never hear her voice again?’”

He looks up, and finding that nobody makes any sign of caring a hang whether he does or not, he repeats the question louder.

STAGE MANAGER (*severely, as if this was a question that really must be answered*). “‘Shall I never hear her voice again?’ Oh! that’s a music cue, Mr P. Have you got it down? Miss ——” (*stage name of the manager’s wife*) “sings a song there, without.”

MR P. “No, I’ll put it down now. What is it—‘hear her voice again?’” (*Writes on some loose slips of paper, lying before him on the stage.*) “Have you the music?”

STAGE MAN. “Oh, anything dismal does. No matter what it is, so long as it gives ’em the hump. What will you have, my dear?”

MANAGER’S WIFE (*who has just finished a social bottle of Bass with another lady*). “Oh, the old thing, you know. ‘Home, sweet home.’”

JUVENILES (*in a whisper to LOW COM.*). “Is she going to sing?”

LOW COM. "Yes, always does it."

JUVENILES. "Oh, my——!"

MAN. WIFE *and* THE FIDDLE *do first verse of*
"Home, sweet home."

FIRST OLD MAN. "' Ah, that voice—er-er—
 echo of old memories—er-er-er—houseless wan-
 derer—dry herself' " (*crossing, and opening an*
imaginary door). "Poor child—er-er-er—I'm an
 old man—er—my wife's out—return and—er—
 the homeless orphan.' "

MAN. WIFE. Will there be any lime-light on
 here? "

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*sotto voce*). "Oh, let her
 have some lime-light. She wants to let her back
 hair down."

STAGE MAN. "Certainly, my dear. There'll be a
 fire-place in this corner, and red lime-light from it."

MAN. WIFE. "Oh, all right; I only wanted to
 know. Now, what was it—'homeless orphan.'
 Oh, that's my long speech, you know: 'Is this a
 dream that I have dreamt before,—played here
 when a child?' "

FIRST O. M. "' Sweet child—your face recalls
 strange memories of—er-er-er—been just your
 age.' "

STAGE MAN. (*interrupting*). "Slow music throughout."

FIRST O. M. (*continuing*). "'Never from that night—er—golden—I can't believe she's dead.'"

Scrape from the fiddle, followed by bar, to bring on FIRST OLD WOMAN.

FIRST O. W. (*without moving from her seat, and coming straight to the cue with a suddenness which startles everybody*). "'Fold you to my breast.'"

MAN. WIFE. "'Mother!'—Got the rheumatism again?"

FIRST O. W. "Got it *again*! It's never gone yet, drat it—'My child!'"

Powerful scrape from the fiddle.

FIRST O. M. "Where am I?"

STAGE MAN. "Left, down stage."

MAN. WIFE. "We embrace, left centre. Knock heard."

STAGE MAN. (*crossing centre*). "That's me.* Keep it up: it's a picture. You and Mrs —— there, embracing, and the old boy down in the

* That was the way he treated Lindley Murray. We were inexpressibly grieved and shocked—all of us—but what were we to do?

corner, when I open the door.—Rain and wind for this scene, mind.”

HOVERING CARPENTER (*at top of his voice*).
“Jim! wind and rain for last scene of first act.”

Husky but indignant voice from the flies, expressing an earnest desire that every one should go to the devil.

STAGE MAN. (*who always rehearsed his speeches at full length, and in a tone of voice as if he were reciting the multiplication table*). “‘I am pursued. My life is at stake. Hide me from these blood-hounds who are on my track. Hark! they are here. Thank Heaven, they are past. I am safe. Ha, who is this we have here? S’death, I am in luck to-night. Sir Henry will thank me, when I bring his strayed lamb back to him. Come with me, my little runaway.’ Business. ‘Nay, resist not, or ’twill be the worse for all.’ I catch hold of you. We struggle. ‘Come, I say, with me. Come, I say.’”

FIRST O. W.—“‘Die together.’”

Scrape from the fiddle.

STAGE MAN. (*loudly, after waiting a minute*).
“‘Die together.’”

FIRST O. M. “I beg pardon. I didn’t hear.”
(*Fumbles with his part, and loses his place.*)

MAN. WIFE. "He really ought to use an ear-trumpet."

FIRST O. M. "'Er-r-r—Heaven will give me strength—er—can strike a blow.'" (*Shakes his stick at STAGE MANAGER.*)

Tremendous hammering suddenly begun at back, eliciting forcible expressions of disapproval from all the members of the company, with the exception of the FIRST OLD MAN, who doesn't hear it, and goes on calmly with the rehearsal all by himself.

STAGE MAN. (*in a rage*). "Stop that noise! Stop that noise, I say!"

Noise continues.

JIM (*eager for the fray*). "How can we do our work without noise, I should like to know?"

STAGE MAN. (*crossly*). "Can't you do it at some other time?"

JIM (*angrily*). "No, we can't do it at some other time! Do you think we're here all night?"

STAGE MAN. (*mildly*). "But, my dear fellow, how can we go on with the rehearsal?"

JIM (*in a rage*). "I don't know anything about you and your rehearsal! That's not my business, is it? I do my own work; I don't do other people's work! I don't want to be told how to

do my work! (*Pours forth a flood of impassioned eloquence for the next ten minutes, during which time the hammering is also continued. Complete collapse of STAGE MANAGER and suspension of rehearsal. Subsequent dryness on the part of JIM.*)

MAN. WIFE (*when rehearsal is at last resumed*).
 "Just try back that last bit, will you, for positions?"

The last two or three movements gone over again.
 Then:

STAGE MAN. "We all three struggle towards door. 'Stand back, old man! I do not wish to harm thee!'—I push you aside. 'Back, or it will be murder!'—This must be well worked up. 'Who dares to stay me?'" (*to LOW COMEDY*).
 "There'll be a bar to bring you on. You know the business."

LOW COM. (*coming forward*). "'Shure an I will.'"

Scrape from fiddle.

STAGE MAN. "Well, then there's our struggle."
 (*STAGE MANAGER and LOW COMEDY take hold of each other's shoulders, and turn round*). "I'll have the book in the left-hand side."

LOW COM. "'Ah, begorra, shure he's clane

gone ; but, be jabbers, I've got this" ' (*holding up an imaginary pocket-book*), "'and it's worth a precious deal more than he is.' "

STAGE MAN. "End of first act.—Tommy, go and fetch me half a pint of stout."

CHAPTER VI

SCENERY AND SUPERS

WE had five rehearsals for this play.

“What the dickens do they want with so many?” was the indignant comment of the First Old Woman. “Why, they’ll rehearse it more times than they’ll play it.”

I thought five a ridiculously small number at the time, especially when I remembered my amateur days, and the thirty or so rehearsals, nearly all full-dress ones, required for a short farce ; but there came a time when I looked upon two as betokening extraordinary anxiety about a production. In the provinces, I have known a three-act comedy put on without any rehearsal at all, and with half the people not even knowing the patter. “Business” was arranged in whispered consultations, while the play was proceeding, and when things got into a more than usually glorious muddle, one or other of the characters would come off the stage

and have a look at the book. As for the prompter, after vainly struggling to keep them to one act at a time, and to dissuade the hero from making love to the wrong girl, he came to the conclusion that he was only in the way, and so went and had a quiet pipe at the stage-door, and refrained from worrying himself further.

The rehearsals got more ship-shape as we went on. At the fourth, every one was supposed to be "letter perfect," and "parts" were tabooed. On this occasion, the piece was played straight through with nothing omitted, and the orchestra (two fiddles, a bass-viol, cornet, and drum) appeared in full force. For the last rehearsal, props and scenery were called. We had an exciting time with Jim, over the scenery, as might be expected. He had a row with everybody, and enjoyed himself immensely.

I saw our scene painter then for the first time. He was a jolly little fellow, and as full of cheery contrivance as a Mark Tapley. No difficulties seemed to daunt him. If a court of justice were wanted for the following night, and the nearest thing he had to it were a bar parlour, he was not in the least dismayed. He would have the bar

parlour down ; paint in a bit here ; paint out a bit there ; touch up a bit somewhere else—there was your court of justice ! Half an hour was quite long enough for him to turn a hayfield into a churchyard, or a prison into a bedroom.

There was only one want, in the present case, that he didn't supply, and that was cottages. All the virtuous people in the play lived in cottages. I never saw such a run on cottages. There were plenty of other residences to which they would have been welcome—halls, palaces, and dungeons, the saloon cabin of a P. and O. steamer, drawing-room of No. 200 Belgrave Square (a really magnificent apartment this, with a clock on the mantelpiece). But no, they would all of them live in cottages. It would not pay to alter three or four different scenes, and turn them all into cottages, especially as they might, likely enough, be wanted for something else in a week's time ; so our one cottage interior had to accommodate about four distinct families. To keep up appearances, however, it was called by a different name on each occasion. With a round table and a candle, it was a widow's cottage. With two candles and a gun, it was the blacksmith's house. A square table

instead of a round one—"Daddy Solomon's home on the road to London. 'Home, sweet home.' " Put a spade in the corner, and hang a coat behind the door, and you had the old mill on the Yorkshire moors.

It was all no use though. The audience, on the opening night, greeted its second appearance with cries of kindly recognition, and at once entered into the humour of the thing. A Surrey side Saturday night audience are generally inclined to be cheerful, and, if the fun on the stage doesn't satisfy them, they rely on their own resources. After one or two more appearances, the cottage became an established favourite with the gallery. So much so, indeed, that when two scenes passed without its being let down, there were many and anxious inquiries after it, and an earnest hope expressed that nothing serious had happened to it. Its reappearance in the next act (as something entirely new) was greeted with a round of applause, and a triumphant demand to know, "Who said it was lost?"

It was not until the last rehearsal, that the supers were brought into play—or work, as they would have called it. These supers were drawn from two

distinct sources. About half of them were soldiers, engaged to represent the military force of the drama, while the other half, who were to be desperate rioters, had been selected from among the gentry of the New Cut neighbourhood.

The soldiers, who came under the command of their sergeant, were by far the best thing in the play. They gave an air of reality to all the scenes in which they appeared. They *were* soldiers, and went about their business on the stage with the same calm precision that they would have displayed in the drill yard, and with as much seriousness as if they had been in actual earnest. When the order was given to "fix bayonets and charge," they did so with such grim determination, that there was no necessity at all to direct the stage mob to "feign fear and rush off L. I. E." They went as one man, in a hurry. There was no trouble, either, about rehearsing the soldiers—no cursing and swearing required, which, in itself, was an immense saving of time. The stage manager told the sergeant what was wanted. That gruff-voiced officer passed the order on to his men (first translating it into his own unintelligible lingo), and the thing was done.

To represent soldiers on the stage, real soldiers should, without doubt, be employed, but it is no good attempting to use them for anything else. They are soldier-like in everything they do. You may dress them up in what you choose, and call them what you will, but they will never be anything else but soldiers. On one occasion, our manager tried them as a rabble. They were carefully instructed how to behave. They were told how to rush wildly on with a fierce, tumultuous yell; how to crowd together at the back of the stage, and, standing there, surging backwards and forwards like an angry sea, brandish their weapons, and scowl menacingly upon the opposing myrmidons of the law, until, at length, their sullen murmurs deepening into a roar of savage hate, they would break upon the wall of steel before them, and sweep it from their path, as pent-up waters, bursting their bonds, bear down some puny barrier.

That was the theory of the thing. That is how a stage mob *ought* to behave itself. How it really does behave itself is pretty generally known. It comes in with a jog-trot, every member of it prodding the man in front of him in the small of his back. It spreads itself out in a line across the

stage and grins. When the signal is given for the rush, each man—still grinning—walks up to the soldier nearest to him, and lays hold of that warrior's gun. The two men then proceed to heave the murderous weapon slowly up and down, as if it were a pump handle. This they continue to do with steady perseverance, until the soldier, apparently from a fit of apoplexy—for there is no outward and visible cause whatever to account for it—suddenly collapses, when the conquering rioter takes the gun away from him, and entangles himself in it.

This is funny enough, but our soldiers made it funnier still. One might just as well have tried to get a modern House of Commons to represent a disorderly rabble. They simply couldn't do it. They went on in single file at the double quick, formed themselves into a hollow square in the centre of the stage, and then gave three distinct cheers, taking time from the sergeant. That was their notion of a rabble.

The other set, the regular bob (sometimes eighteenpence) a-night "sūps," were of a very different character. Professional supers, taken as a class, are the most utterly dismal specimens of humanity to be met with in this world. Com-

pared with them "sandwich-men" are dashing and rollicky. Ours were no exception to the rule. They hung about in a little group by themselves, and looked such a picture of dejected dinginess, that their mere presence had a depressing effect upon everybody else. Strange that men can't be gay and light-hearted on an income of six shillings a week, but so it is.

One of them I must exclude from this description—a certain harmless idiot, who went by the title of "Mad Mat," though he himself always gave his name as "Mr Matthew Alexander St George Clement."

This poor fellow had been a super for a good many years, but there had evidently been a time when he had played a very different part in life. "Gentleman" was stamped very plainly upon his thin face, and where he was not crazy, he showed thought and education. Rumour said that he had started life as a young actor, full of promise and talent, but what had sent him mad nobody knew. The ladies naturally attributed it to love, it being a fixed tenet among the fair sex that everything that happens to mankind, from finding themselves in bed with their boots on to having the water cut

off, is all owing to that tender passion. On the other hand the uncharitable—generally a majority—suggested drink. But nobody did anything more than conjecture: nobody really knew. The link between the prologue and the play was lost. Mat himself was under the firm conviction that he was a great actor, who was only kept from appearing in the leading *rôles* by professional jealousy. But a time would come, and then he would show us what he could do. Romeo was his great ambition. One of these days he meant to act that character. He had been studying it for years, he once whispered me in confidence, and when he appeared in it, he knew he should make a sensation.

Strange to say, his madness did not interfere at all with his superial duties. While on the stage, he was docile enough, and did just as he saw the other supers do. It was only off the stage that he put on his comically pathetic dignity: then, if the super-master attempted to tell him what to do, he would make a ceremonious bow, and observe, with some hauteur, that Mr St George Clement was not accustomed to be instructed how to act his part. He never mixed with the other supers,

but would stand apart, talking low to himself, and seeming to see something a long way off. He was the butt of the whole theatre, and his half-timid, half-pompous ways afforded us a good deal of merriment; but sometimes there was such a sad look in Mat's white face, that it made one's heart ache more than one's sides.

His strange figure and vague history haunted my thoughts in a most uncomfortable manner. I used to think of the time when those poor vacant eyes looked out upon the world, full of hope and ambition, and then I wondered if *I* should ever become a harmless idiot, who thought himself a great actor.

CHAPTER VII

DRESSING

WE had no dress rehearsal. In the whole course of my professional life, I remember but one dress rehearsal. That was for a pantomime in the provinces. Only half the costumes arrived in time for it. I myself appeared in a steel breast-plate and helmet, and a pair of check trousers; and I have a recollection of seeing somebody else—the King of the Cannibal Islands, I think—going about in spangled tights and a frock coat. There was a want of finish, as one might say, about the affair.

Old stagers, of course, can manage all right without them, but the novice finds it a little awkward to jump from plain dress rehearsals to the performance itself. He has been making love to a pale-faced, middle-aged lady, dressed in black grenadine and a sealskin jacket, and he is quite

lost when smiled upon by a high-complexioned, girlish young thing, in blue silk stockings and short skirts. He finds defying stout, good-tempered Mr Jones a very different thing to bullying a beetle-browed savage, of appearance something between Bill Sykes and a Roman gladiator, and whose acquaintance he then makes for the first time. Besides, he is not at all sure that he has got hold of the right man.

I, in my innocence, so fully expected at least one dress rehearsal, that, when time went on, and there were no signs of any such thing, I mooted the question myself, so that there should be no chance of its being accidentally overlooked. The mere idea, however, was scouted. It was looked upon as the dream of a romantic visionary.

"Don't talk about dress rehearsals, my boy," was the reply; "think yourself lucky if you get your dress all right by the night."

The "my boy," I may remark, by no means implied that the speaker thought me at all youthful. Indeed, seeing that I was eighteen at the time, it hardly could, you know. Every actor is "my boy," just, as before mentioned, every actress is "my dear." At first I was rather offended;

but when I heard grey-headed stars, and respectable married leads, addressed in the same familiar and unceremonious manner, my dignity recovered itself. It is well our dignity is not as brittle as Humpty Dumpty. How very undignified we should all become, before we had been long in this world.

As a matter of fact, nobody—at all events, none of the men, with the exception of Chequers—seemed to care in the slightest about what they should wear. “Chequers” was the name we had given to our walking gentleman, as a delicate allusion to the pattern of his overcoat. I think I have already described the leading features in this young man’s private-life apparel. He went in a good deal for dress, and always came out strong. His present ambition was to wear his new ulster in the piece, and this he did, though, seeing that the action of the play was supposed to take place a century ago, it was hardly consistent with historical accuracy. But then historical accuracy was not a strong point with our company, who went more on the principle of what you happened to have by you. At the better class of London theatre, everything is now provided by the man-

agement, and the actor has only to put on what is given him. But with the theatres and companies into which I went, things were very different; costume being generally left to each person's individual discretion. For ordinary modern-dress parts, we had to use our own things entirely, and in all cases we were expected to find ourselves in hosiery and boot leather, by which I mean such things as tights and stockings, and the boots and shoes of every period and people; the rest of the costume was provided for us—at all events in London.

In the provinces, where every article necessary for either a classical tragedy or a pantomime has often to be found by the actor himself, I have seen some very remarkable wardrobe effects. A costume play, under these circumstances, rivalled a fancy dress ball in variety. It was considered nothing out of the way for a father, belonging to the time of George III., to have a son who, evidently from his dress, flourished in the reign of Charles II. As for the supers, when there were any, they were attired in the first thing that came to hand, and always wore their own boots.

Picturesqueness was the great thing. Even now

and at some of the big London houses, this often does duty for congruity and common sense. The tendency to regard all female foreigners as Italian peasant girls, and to suppose that all agricultural labourers wear red waistcoats embroidered with yellow, still lingers on the stage.

Even where costumes were provided, the leading actors, and those who had well-stocked wardrobes of their own, generally preferred to dress the part themselves, and there was nobody who did not supplement the costumier's ideas to some greater or less extent.

I am speaking only of the men. Actresses nearly always find their own dresses. There is no need of a very varied wardrobe in their case, for in spite of all the talk about female fashions, a woman's dress is much the same now as in the time of the Mrs Noahs—at least, so it seems to me, judging from my own ark. The dress that Miss Eastlake wore in the *Silver King* would, I am sure, do all right for Ophelia ; and what difference is there between Queen Elizabeth and Mrs Bouncer ? None whatever, except about the collar and the sleeves ; and anybody can alter a pair of sleeves and make a ruff. Why do actresses have

so many dresses! As far as mere shape is concerned, one would do for everything, with a few slight alterations. You just tack on a tuck or a furbelow, or take in a flounce, and there you are.

Maybe I'm wrong, though.

We were told to look in at the costumier's some time during the week, for him to take our measurement, and those of us who were inexperienced in theatrical costumiers did so, and came away with a hopeful idea that we were going to be sent clothes that would nearly fit us. The majority, however, did not go through this farce, but quietly took what they found in their dressing-rooms on the opening night, and squeezed themselves into, or padded themselves out to it, as the necessity happened to be.

The dressing-rooms (two rows of wooden sheds, divided by a narrow passage) were situate over the property room, and were reached by means of a flight of steps, which everybody ascended and descended very gingerly indeed, feeling sure each time that the whole concern would come down before they got to the other end. These apartments had been carefully prepared for our recep-

tion. The extra big holes in the partitions had been bunged up with brown paper, and the white-wash had been laid on everywhere with a lavishness that betokened utter disregard of the expense ; though as, before a week was over, nearly the whole of it had been transferred to our clothes, this was rather a waste, so far as the management was concerned. It was even reported that one of the rooms had been swept out, but I never saw any signs of such a thing having been done myself either then or at any other time, and am inclined to look upon the statement merely in the light of a feeler, thrown out for the purpose of getting at the views of the charwoman. If so, however, it was a failure. She said nothing on hearing it, but looked offended, and evidently considered it a subject that should not have been mentioned to a lady.

One or two of the doors still hung upon their hinges, and could, with a little manœuvring, be opened or shut : but in most cases they had been wrenched off, and stood propped up against their own posts, like drunken revellers taken home by the cabman. The only means, therefore, of getting in or out of the rooms was by lifting them bodily

away. It was a pretty sight to watch some stout, short-winded actor, staggering about the place with one of these great doors in his arms, trying to make it stand up. After a series of fearful efforts, he would get it wedged firmly across the passage, and, at that exact moment, some one would be sure to come rushing up stairs in a desperate hurry to get to his room. He could not, of course, pass while the wretched door was in that position, so, with a view of expediting matters, he would lay hold of the other side of it, and begin tugging. The first man, not being able to see what was going on, and thinking larks were being played with him, would plunge about more wildly than ever, and jam the door down on the other fellow's toes. Then they would both grapple madly with it, one on each side, bump each other's head with it, crush each other with it against the sides of the passage, and end by all three going down in a heap together, the door uppermost.

The furniture provided, simple though it was, had evidently been selected with a thoughtful desire that everything should be in keeping: it consisted of a few broken chairs. The supply of toilet requisites in hand, too, seemed to be

rather limited, but great care and ingenuity had been displayed in their distribution. There not being enough basins and jugs to go all round, these had been divided. Some rooms had a jug but no basin, while others had a basin but no jug, either circumstance being a capital excuse for leaving them without any water. Where there was neither basin nor jug, you could safely reckon on a soap dish. We were supplied with towels, the allowance being one a fortnight—a small thin one with a big hole in the middle—amongst six, but we brought our own soap : at least some of us did, and the others, without a moment's hesitation, appropriated it.

One of the rooms was better appointed than the others, being able to boast a washstand, made out of an old cane chair that had lost its back and one of its legs. This article of luxury was the cause of a good deal of bitterness at first among the occupants of the less favoured apartments, but its tendency towards sudden and unexpected collapse soon lessened this feeling of envy. Even its owners ceased to take any pride in it, after a while, and it was eventually kicked to pieces in a fit of frenzy by Juveniles ; it having been the cause, as far as we

could gather from his disjointed blasphemy, of his being compelled to play all the rest of that evening in sopping wet tights.

A blear-eyed individual used to hang about these rooms of a night. He called himself a dresser, though, for all the dressing he ever did, he might just as well have been a kitchen one. He got a dressing himself once for upsetting a pot of paint over Jim's supper ; but that was the only one he ever, to my knowlege, assisted at. However, he came in handy to go out for sheep's head and porter.

But although the dressing-rooms surprised me somewhat, they did not disappoint me. I had built no expectations upon them. I had conjured up no airy visions concerning them. Mine eyes had not hungered to gaze upon their imagined glories. No, the dressing-rooms I bore up under : it was the green room that crushed me. It was about the green room that my brightest hopes had been centred. It was there that I was to flirt with Beauty, and converse with Intellect. I had pictured a brilliantly lighted and spacious apartment with a polished oak floor, strewn with costly rugs ; gilded walls, hung with the choicest gems of art ;

and a lofty, painted ceiling. There would be luxurious easy-chairs and couches, upon which to rest ourselves between our artistic labours; a piano, from which fairy fingers would draw forth rapturous strains, while I turned over the music; and carved cabinets, filled with old china, and other rare and precious nicknacks. Heavy curtains, over the door, would deaden the outside din to a droning murmur, which would mingle pleasantly with the low hum of cheerful conversation within; whilst the flickering fire-light, flashing upon the Spanish mahogany furniture, and glittering reflected in the many mirrors round the room, would throw a touch of homeliness over what might otherwise have been the almost too dazzling splendour of the place.

There was no green room. There never had been a green room. I never saw a green room except in a play, though I was always on the lookout for it. I met an old actor once who had actually been in one, and I used to get him to come and tell me all about it. But even his recollections were tinged with a certain vagueness. He was not quite sure whether it had been at Liverpool or at Newcastle that he had come across

it, and at other times he thought it must have been at Exeter. But wherever it was, the theatre had been burnt down a good many years ago—about that he was positive.

On one occasion, I went specially to a big London theatre where, I was assured, there really was one, and it cost me four-and-sevenpence in drinks. I found the green room all right, but they said I had better not go in, because it was chock full of properties, and I might break something in the dark.

The truth is that where a green room was originally provided, it has been taken by the star or the manager, as his or her private room, and the rest of the company are left to spend their off time either in their own dressing-rooms, where they are always in each other's way, or at the wings, where they catch cold, and are hustled by the scene-shifters.

CHAPTER VIII

MY "FIRST DEBOO"

ON Saturday came the opening night, and with it my first appearance before the British public—my "first deboo" as our perruquier called it. In thinking about it beforehand, I had been very much afraid lest I should be nervous ; but, strange to say, I never experienced stage-fright at any time. I say strange, because, at that period of my life at all events, I was—as true greatness generally is—of a modest and retiring disposition. In my very early youth, I believe, I was not so. I am told that in my frock and pinafore days, I used to stand upon the table, and recite poetry to the intense gratification of my elderly relatives (ah, the old folks knew how to enjoy themselves, when I was a boy !); and an old nurse of mine always insisted that on one occasion I collected half a crown in an omnibus by my spirited rendering of " Baa,

baa, black sheep." I have no recollection of this performance myself though, and, if it really did take place, where's the money? This part of the question has never, to my mind, been satisfactorily cleared up.

But however self-possessed I may have been at eight, I was anything but so at eighteen. Even now, I would not act to a drawing-room full of people for a thousand pounds—supposing the company considered the effort worth that sum. But before a public audience, I was all right, and entirely free from that shyness about which, in private life, my lady friends so bitterly complain. I could not see the people for one thing—at all events, not those beyond the third row of stalls. The blaze of light surrounding one on the stage, and the dimness of the rest of the house, give the audience a shadowy and ghost-like appearance, and make it impossible to see more than a general mass of white faces. As I never noticed the "hundreds upon hundreds of glaring eyes," they did not trouble me, and I let 'em glare. The most withering glance in the world won't crush a blind man.

If I had been nervous on the first night, I think

I should have had a good excuse for it, knowing, as I did, that a select party of my most particular friends, including a few medical students and clergymen's sons, were somewhere in the theatre; having come down in a body with the intention of giving me a fair start, as they said. They had insisted on coming. I had begged them not to trouble themselves on my account, but they wouldn't hear of it. They said it would be such a comfort to me to know that they were there. That was their thoughtful kindness. It touched me.

I said: "Look here, you know, if you fellows are going to play the fool, I'll chuck the whole blessed thing up."

They said they were not going to play the fool: they were coming to see me. I raised no further objections.

But I checkmated them. I lied to those confiding young men with such an air of simple truthfulness, that they believed me, though they had known me for years. Even now, after all this time, I feel a glow of pride when I think how consummately I deceived them. They knew nothing of the theatres or actors over the water, so I just

gave them the name of our first old man, and told them that that was the name I had taken. I exaggerated the effect of making up, and impressed upon them the idea that I should be so changed that they would never believe it was I; and I requested them especially to note my assumed voice. I did not say what character I was going to play, but I let slip a word now and then implying that my mind was running on grey hairs and long-lost children, and I bought a stick exactly similar to the one the poor old gentleman was going to use in the part, and let it lie about.

So far as I was concerned, the plan was a glorious success, but the effect upon the old man was remarkable. He was too deaf to hear exactly what was going on, but he gathered enough to be aware that he was the object of a certain amount of attention, and that he was evidently giving great satisfaction to a portion of the audience; which latter circumstance apparently surprised him. The dear fellows gave him a splendid reception when he first appeared. They applauded everything he said or did throughout the play, and called for him after every act. They encored his defiance of the villain, and, when he came on with-

out his hat in a snow scene, they all pulled out their pocket-handkerchiefs and sobbed aloud. At the end they sent a message round to tell him to hurry up, as they were waiting for him at the stage door, an announcement that had the effect of sending him out by the front way in wonderfully quick time.

On the whole, that first night passed off pretty well. First nights are trying times at all theatres. The state of excitement behind the scenes is at fever heat, and the stage manager and the head carpenter become positively dangerous. In sensation pieces, where the author plays second fiddle to the scene-shifter, this, of course, is especially the case.

Now—as all modern playgoers know—there are never any hitches or delays on first-nights. At all events, not at any of the West-end houses, where everything is always a “triumph of stage management!” But in my time, hitches on first nights were the rule rather than the exception, and when a scene was got through without any special mishap, we felt we were entitled to shake hands with one another. I remember one first night at a London theatre where the sensation was to be the fall of a house, crushing the villain

(*literally*) at the end of the fourth act. Great expectations were entertained about this "effect." It was confidently calculated that the collapse of this building would bring down the house, and so no doubt it would have done, if, owing to a mistake in the cues, the curtain had not come down first. The house fell beautifully, the dummy villain was killed on the spot, and the heroine saved in the nick of time by the hero (who, in these plays, is always just round the corner), but the audience only wondered what all the noise was about, and why no one had struck an attitude at the end of the act.

But however flat things fell in front, the sensation behind was undoubted. When the excitement had partially subsided, there was an energetic inquiry for the man who had let down the curtain, but it appeared that he had left without stopping even to put on his hat. This did not transpire at the time, however, and, for half an hour afterwards, the manager was observed to be wandering about with a crowbar, apparently looking for some one.

The premature rise of curtains is attended with still more ludicrous results. On one occa-

sion, I call to mind, the "rag" went up unexpectedly, and discovered the following scene :

The king of the country, sitting by the side of his dying son. He is drinking beer out of a bottle. His wig and beard lie beside him on the floor.—The dying son, touching herself up by the aid of a powder-puff and a hand-glass.—The chief priest of the country (myself) eating a Bath bun, while a friendly super buttons him up the back.

Another time I recollect was at a very small provincial theatre. There was only one dressing-room in the whole place, and that the ladies had of course. We men had to dress on the stage itself. You can imagine the rest—the yell, the confusion ; the wild stampede ; the stage looking like the south bank of the Serpentine after 8 p.m. ; the rapid descent of the curtain ; the enthusiastic delight of the audience. It was the greatest success we had during our stay.

I have a strong opinion, however, that this latter catastrophe was not due so much to accident as to a certain mean villain among the company, whose name, in consideration of his family, I refrain from mentioning.

CHAPTER IX

BIRDS OF PREY

I REMAINED in London with my first manager during the whole summer season, which lasted about nine months, and I think that, altogether, it was the happiest period of my stage career. The company was a thoroughly agreeable one. It was a genial, jovial company—a “Here you are, my boy ; just in time for a pull” sort of company—a “Hail fellow well met” with everybody else sort of company. Among players, there are none of those caste distinctions such as put an insurmountable barrier between the man who sells coal by the ton and the man who sells it by the hundred-weight. “The Profession” is a Republic. Lead and Utility walk about arm-in-arm, and the Star and the Singing Chambermaid drink out of the same pewter. We were all as friendly and sociable together as brothers and sisters—perhaps

even more so—and the evening spent in those bare dressing-rooms was the pleasantest part of the day. There was never a dull moment, but always plenty of bustle and fun, plenty of anecdotes, plenty of good stories—ah, they could tell 'em!—plenty of flirting, and talking, and joking, and laughing.

What jolly little suppers they were, too, brought in smoking hot from the cook-shop over the way, and in the middle of which we had to be constantly rushing off with our mouths full to rescue some unfortunate female who was always getting into trouble, or to murder an uncle; and how wide we had to open our lips, when eating, lest we should rub the carmine off! How delicious a quart of six ale was after a row with the police, or a struggle with the man who had carried off the girl! How enjoyable a smoke when you had to hide your pipe in your boot each time you heard a footstep, because smoking was strictly prohibited!

I was not so contented at first as I might have been. I expected about three pounds a week salary after giving my one month gratis, and I did not get it. My agreement, it may be remem-

bered, stipulated that I should receive a "salary according to ability" at the end of that time, but the manager said he did not think there would ever be enough money in the house to pay me at that scale, and suggested nine shillings a week instead, generously giving me the option of either taking it or leaving it. I took it.

I took it because I saw plainly enough that if I didn't I should get nothing, that he could find twenty other young fellows as good as I to come without any salary at all, and that the agreement was not worth the paper it was written on. I was wroth at the time, but, seeing that the nine shillings was soon raised to twelve, and afterwards to fifteen and eighteen, I had really, taking things as they were, nothing to grumble at; and, when I came to know a little more about professional salaries, and learnt what even the old hands were glad to get, I was very well satisfied.

The company was engaged at summer prices, which are a good deal less than winter ones, and these latter average something less than the wages of an industrious sweep. The public, who read of this actor receiving a hundred and twenty pounds a night, of that actress making eight hundred

pounds a week, of a low comedian's yearly income being somewhere about six thousand pounds, and of a London manager who has actually paid his rates and taxes (so he says), can scarcely have any idea of what existence at the bottom of the stage ladder is like. It is a long ladder, and there are very few who possess a personal experience of both ends. Those who do, however, must appreciate the contrast. Mr Henry Irving, speaking somewhere of his early days, mentions his weekly salary, I think, as having been twenty-five shillings ; and, no doubt at the time, he thought that very good, and can most likely remember when he got less. In the provinces, thirty shillings is a high figure for a good all-round "responsibles," and for that amount he is expected to be equal to Othello or Sir Peter Teazle at a moment's notice, and to find his own dress. A "lead" may get three pounds in the winter, and a young "utility" thinks himself very well off indeed on a guinea. Now and again, the latter will get twenty-two or three shillings, but this only leads him into habits of extravagance, and he suffers for it afterwards. At the minor London theatres, there being no expenses connected with travelling, etc., the

salaries are even less, and from eighteen shillings to two pounds are about the sums *promised*.

I do not believe I should ever have got even the salary I did, if it had not been for the extraordinary circumstance of a really successful season, so successful, indeed, that the fact could not be disguised, and, for the last three or four months—excess of good fortune having evidently turned the manager's head—salaries were paid *regularly and in full*! This is not romancing, it is plain, sober truth. Such a thing may surprise my readers, especially those who know much about the stage, but it cannot surprise them one fiftieth part so much as it surprised us. It completely bewildered the majority of the company. To have anything more than five shillings paid to them at one time seemed to confuse them, and, on treasury days, they went away from the theatre with a puzzled air of affluence and responsibility.

They had not been accustomed to receiving salaries in that way. What they had been used to was, say, two-and-sixpence one day, sixpence at the beginning of the next night, another twopence after the first act, and eightpence as they were going away.

“That makes one-and-four you’ve had to-night, and two-and-sixpence last night makes three-and-ten, mind.”

“Yes, but, hang it all, you know, there was four shillings owing from last week, and five-and-sixpence from the week before, that I’ve never had yet.”

“My dear boy, for Heaven’s sake don’t talk about last week and the week before. Do let’s keep to one week at a time. We can’t go back to the Flood.”

They had been accustomed to haggle and fight for every penny they got ; to dodge and trick and bully for their money in a way that a sixty-per-cent. money-lender would rather lose principal and interest than resort to ; to entreat and clamour for it like Italian beggar children ; to hang about after the acting manager like hungry dogs after a cat’s-meat man ; to come down to the theatre early in the morning and wait all day for him ; to watch outside his room by the hour together, so as to rush in the moment the door was opened, and stick there till he threw them a shilling ; to lie in wait at dark corners and spring out upon him as he passed ; to run after him up stairs and down

stairs ; to sneak after him into public-house bars ; or to drive him into a corner and threaten to punch his head unless he gave them another sixpence—this last expedient, of course, being possible only when the actor was big and the acting manager little. Fortunately acting managers mostly were little, otherwise the profession would have died of starvation.

If, as sometimes happened, they left the acting manager alone, and went for the lessee himself, the latter would always refer them to the former, assuming for himself a magnificent indifference about such trivial things as money matters ; and he would even play out the farce to the length of sending for the acting manager, and begging that gentleman, as a personal favour to himself, to let Mr So-and-So be paid without further delay, which the acting manager would gravely promise should be done.

If it had not filled one with shame for one's profession, it would have been amusing to listen to some of the comedies nightly played behind the scenes.

“ Look here,” says the ghost of Hamlet's father, suddenly darting out of its dressing-room, and

confronting the acting manager, who, thinking the coast was clear, has made a dash down the passage; "look here, if I don't have something, I don't go on."

"My dear boy," replies the acting manager, in a tone of suppressed exasperation mingled with assumed sympathy, and glancing furtively about for a chance of escape, "I really cannot. I have not got a penny. I will see you later on, when I shall have some money. I must go now. There's somebody waiting for me in front."

"I don't care who is waiting for you in front. I've been waiting for you behind for two nights, and I mean to have some money."

"How can I give you any money, when I haven't got any!" This is the gist of what he says. The embellishments had better not be added, here. Realism is an excellent thing in its way, but a Zola must draw the line somewhere.

After this, seeing that the actor looks determined, he begins to fumble in his pocket, and at last brings out half-a-crown, and presents it—without compliments.

"This won't do for me," says the other, first

pocketing the money ; “ I can’t live for four days on half-a-crown.”

Then the acting manager, with a further string of needless comments, thrust five shillings into his hand, and rushes past, for he hears a footstep on the stairs, and fears another onslaught.

It is one of the chief characteristics of both managers and acting managers that they never do have any money. If caught holding it open in their hands, they always, from mere force of habit, say they haven’t got any. A common answer to an appeal is : “ I really haven’t got any money at all, my boy : how much do you want ? ”

The women, of course, could not bully for their money, but they shewed a quiet, never-tiring persistence, more effective perhaps than all our storming. Certain it is that on the whole they were more successful than the men, and this might have been attributed to their sex’s irresistible wheedling powers, if one could possibly have imagined such a thing as an acting manager open to humanizing influences.

Nobody grumbled at this state of things. The pleasure and surprise of getting any money at all

was so great that the trouble of getting it was forgotten. They were too used to being robbed of all their earnings to mind being defrauded of only a part. An absconding manager was so common a thing that he did not even excite remark. He was regarded as something in the ordinary way of business, and his victims only sighed, when he was gone, and proceeded to look out for somebody else to cheat them.

And such another was by no means difficult to find in my time: the roll of theatrical managers teemed with thieves. It seemed to me that whenever a man got kicked out of everything else, he engaged as big a blackguard as himself for his acting manager and started a show. It must have been a profitable game, that played by these swindling managers, and there was no risk of any kind attending it. Nobody ever thought of interfering with them. If, by any clumsy accident on their own part, they did get within the clutches of the law, no harm came to them. County Court judges appeared to regard their frauds as mere practical jokes, and the worst they had to fear was a playful admonition of the "Ah well, you mustn't do it again, you know," kind.

In the profession itself, they were received with respect, as men of decided talent in their way. Even the most notorious of them were treated with civility, and care was taken never to mention before them such subjects as dishonesty and knavery, for fear of hurting their feelings. When actors and actresses went from London to Aberdeen to join Mr Smith's company, and found on arriving that Mr Smith was the same man who had already swindled them under half a dozen different names at half a dozen different times and places, what do you think they did? Shook hands cordially with the gentleman, made some pleasant observations about having met before, and hoped, in whispers among themselves, that he would not serve them the same this time! Of course, on the first Saturday night, while they were on the stage, he would run off with all the week's takings, go to the next town, and advertise for another company under the name of Jones.

It was no light matter for a man—and worse still for a poor girl—to be left without a penny or a friend in a strange town hundreds of miles from home. The poor players helped each other as well as they could, but provincial Pros. are—or, at

least, were—not a wealthy class, and, after having paid their fares down, and kept themselves for a week or a fortnight, the most bloated capitalists among them rarely had more than a few shillings remaining in their pockets. Wardrobes had to be left as security with irate landladies, and, until they were redeemed or replaced, no other engagement was possible. Friends, poor enough themselves, goodness knows, had to be begged of. Every kind of valuable, even the wedding ring, had to be pawned, and the return home was made with troubled faces and empty hands.

The misery caused by these scoundrels makes one's blood boil to think of. I have known men and women forced to tramp home again half across the kingdom, seeking shelter in casual wards when the nights were too cold or wet to sleep under a haystack. I have known actors and actresses obliged to sell the clothes off their backs in order to get fresh stage wardrobes. I have known whole families, after having scraped together every penny they could get, so as to be able to join one of these companies, come back again a few days afterwards, utterly destitute, and compelled to sell the few sticks of furniture they

had about the place before making another start. I knew one poor fellow, left penniless in Glasgow, with a delicate young wife near her confinement, and they had to come back to London by boat—steerage passage—for, after pledging everything, that was all they had money enough for. It was fearful weather in the middle of January, and the vessel tossed about in the Channel for over a week, landing them just in time for the woman to die at home.

Some managers saved themselves the trouble of running away, and attempted to throw an air of respectability over the proceeding, by paying their company about one-and-sixpence apiece on treasury day, stating that they were very sorry, but that the thing had been a failure; that the houses had been all paper, the expenses unusually heavy, or any other of the stock lies always on hand. And he would think to comfort them by telling them that he himself had lost money, as though that were an unanswerable reason for their losing all theirs!

As to these men losing money of their own, that was impossible. They had not any to lose. Whatever they lost was somebody else's; of that

you may be sure. They were men without any capital whatever, and they made use of actors merely as cat's paws in a speculation where all the risks were with the company, and all the advantages with themselves.

The "share" system was worse even than this. It meant, in plain language, that, if the undertaking failed, the actors shared the losses amongst them, and, if it succeeded, the manager pocketed the profits.

As a matter of fact, actors were then the least considered, and the most imposed upon of any people connected with the stage. If, at that time, one of my friends had started as a theatrical manager, I might, with a view of saving him unnecessary expense, have given him the following hints :—

"You must pay your bill-poster, or he won't stick up your bills, or, if he does, it will be topsyturvy. Pay for your advertisements, or they won't get inserted. Pay your carpenters and scene-shifters, or they'll make it decidedly uncomfortable for you. Pay your money-takers, or they'll pay themselves ; your gas, or it will be cut off ; your rent, or you will be turned into the

street. Be careful to pay the supers, too, or you'll find when it is time for them to go on that they've all gone off. For goodness sake don't keep your charwoman waiting for her wages; you'll not have five minutes' quiet until she is satisfied. And if you don't wish to find yourself in the County Court on Monday morning, pay your call boy on Saturday night. You *must* pay these people. It is not a case of choice, there is simply no help for you; if you don't, you'll have to shut up shop in a couple of days. *But you needn't pay any one else.* If you have a few shillings left that you really don't know what to do with, you might divide it among the actors and actresses; but you can please yourself entirely about this. They work just the same whether they are paid or not.

"Your author, by the bye, is another person you never need pay. Indeed, in his case, it would be positively dangerous to do so. There is no telling what effect such a shock might have upon him.

"Your company will, it is true, pester you a good deal for their money, and grumble and threaten, but it never comes to anything, and,

after a while, you get used to it, and don't mind."

As to actors and actresses taking any actual measures for their own protection, the idea never occurred to them in their wildest dreams. If you suggested such a thing to them, it took their breath away, and you were looked upon as a young man with dangerous revolutionary tendencies that would some day get you into trouble. It was useless for one man to attempt to do anything by himself. I remember an actor summoning a manager who had cheated him out of seven pounds, and, after spending about ten pounds in costs, he got an order for payment by monthly instalments of ten shillings, not one of which, of course, he ever saw. After that, it was next to impossible for him to get a shop (this expression is not slang, it is a bit of local colour). No manager who had heard of the affair would engage him.

"A pretty pass the stage will come to," said they, "if this sort of thing is to become common."

And the newspapers observed, it was a pity that he (the actor) should wash his dirty linen in public.

I have been careful to use the past tense all through these remarks. Some of them would apply very well to the present time, but, on the whole, things have improved since I was on the stage. I am glad of it.

CHAPTER X

I BUY A BASKET, AND GO INTO THE PROVINCES

OUR season at the London theatre came to a close early in December, and, about the end of November, we all began to take a great interest in the last page but one of "The Actor's Bible." Being just before Christmas, which is the busiest period of the theatrical year, there was no difficulty in getting another shop, for "Useful people," "Clever people," "Talented people," "Knockabout people," "First-class High Kickers," and "Entire Dramatic Companies," were wanted here, there, and everywhere. I only answered one advertisement, and was engaged at once; but this, no doubt, was owing to my having taken the precaution, when applying, of enclosing my photograph.

I was to join the company a week before Christmas, at a town in the west of England, where we were to open with pantomime. I was

to give the first week for rehearsals at half salary, afterwards receiving a guinea a week for "responsibles," travelling expenses, when we went on tour, being paid by the management.

And here let me say that a more honourable and courteous gentleman than the manager of this company I never met. We did not even have to ask for our money; we were paid regularly, and to the last farthing, no matter whether business was good or bad. In short, he was an honest man, and as such held a conspicuous position among the theatrical managers of that day.

Previous to leaving London, I got together a small wardrobe. I already had a stock of boots and shoes, and tights, but these were only a few of the things required, and I found it rather an expensive matter before I had done. Varying in price from seven shillings to two pounds, wigs cost the most of anything, and I had to buy seven or eight of these—a "white Court," a "brown George," a "flowing ringlets," a "scratch" (why called scratch I haven't the faintest notion), a "comic old man," a "bald," and a "flow" for everything that one was not quite sure about.

I picked up a good many odds and ends of

costume in Petticoat Lane one Sunday morning. It is a famous place for theatrical wardrobes. I got a complete sailor's suit for five shillings, and a suit of livery for sixteen. Old-fashioned swallow-tails and embroidered waistcoats, knee breeches, blouses, pants, hats, cloaks, and swords were also to be had there in plenty, and at very small cost. My sisters made me some more things (they had become reconciled to my "mad trick" by this time, and had even got to rather like the idea of having an actor in the family), and for the rest I had to go to a regular costumier's. All these articles, together with a pretty complete modern wardrobe, a bundle of acting editions and other books, a "make-up" box, a dressing-case, writing-case, etc., etc., made a pretty big pile, and, as this pile would be increased rather than diminished as time went on, I determined to get one big traveling basket to hold everything, and have done with it.

I did get a big one. I've got it now. It's down stairs in the washhouse. I've never been able to get rid of it from that day to this. I've tried leaving it behind when removing into new lodgings, but it has always been sent on after me,

generally in a waggon with a couple of men, who, evidently imagining they were restoring me a treasured heirloom, have been disappointed at my complete absence of enthusiasm. I have lured stray boys into the house, and offered them half a crown to take it away and lose it, but they have become frightened, and gone home and told their mothers, and, after that, it has got about in the neighbourhood that I have committed a murder. It isn't the sort of thing you can take out with you on a dark night, and drop down somebody else's area.

When I used it, I had to do all my packing in the hall, for it was impossible to get the thing up and down stairs. It always stood just behind the front door, which left about six inches of space for people to squeeze past, and every one that came in got more or less injured. The owner of the house, returning home late at night, would pitch head foremost over it, and begin yelling murder and police, under the impression it was burglars. The girl, coming in with the beer, would bang up against it, and upset the jug over it, when the whole contents would become saturated, and smell like a public-house.

The language used in connection with that basket was simply appalling. It roused railway porters and cabmen to madness, and the savage way in which they rushed upon it used to make my blood run cold. Landladies, who upon my first call had welcomed me with effusion, grew cool and distant when the basket arrived. Nobody had a good word for it. Everywhere, it was hated and despised. I even feared that some day its victims would rise up and sweep it from the face of the earth. But no, it has survived both curses and kicks, and feeling it is hopeless ever to expect to get rid of it, I have made up my mind to be buried in it.

Faithful old basket! it is a good many years since you and I started on our travels that snowy seventeenth of December, and what a row we had with the cabman, ah me! But why did you desert me at Bristol? Why did you——

But stay, wherefore should I go on apostrophizing the miserable old thing in this imbecile manner. And now I come to think of it, why too should I sit here sucking the end of my pen and scowling savagely at the lamp, in the agonies of composition, when "copy," which one of Field

& Tuer's devils is plaguing me for (I do wish they'd send a boy who couldn't whistle), is lying ready to my hand?

Before me, borrowed for reference in penning these reminiscences, is a pile of letters, written during my travels to my old pal, Jim. Here's one:

"Dear Jim,

"We (the basket and I) had a terribly cold journey down. Lost the basket at Bristol and had to telegraph after it. That basket will be the death of me, I know. There is one advantage, though; it stamps you as an actor at once, and the porters don't expect any gratuities. Got jolly lodgings here. Nice, big bedroom, use of sitting-room, full attendance, and cooking for four bob a week. Pleasant, homely people, everything as clean as a new pin, and daughter rather pretty.

"I should have written before, but we have been so busy. Two and sometimes three rehearsals a day, to say nothing of painting the scenery, at which we all assisted. We had a crowded house for the opening on Boxing night, and have had very fair ones ever since—all over fifteen pounds. Serjeant Parry was in the stalls the other night,

and a big London actor, whose name I forget just now. We (I say 'we' because we all help in everything—two of us went out early a morning or two ago bill posting: we've got a regular bill poster, but it's his week for being drunk)—we, then, had a good deal of trouble training the supers and ballet. You should hear the supers dance: you can do so easily a mile off. They shake the whole building. Both they and the ballet are drawn from the fishing population of the town, and this is their first appearance on any stage. The ballet consists of eight at present, but that is only for the first go off, we shall reduce it to six in a little while. We have also got about a dozen children to do a May-pole dance. It's a treat to see them. They are paid threepence a night, but they get three shillings' worth of enjoyment out of it for themselves. There is one little girl with the face of an angel—I honestly confess I've never seen an angel's face, and don't suppose I ever shall till I die, but I think it is that sort of face. She is dressed by seven every evening, and, from then, till she goes on the stage at ten, she is dancing and singing on her own account all over the place. When the May-pole is at last set up,

she stands and gazes at it open-mouthed, and laughs to herself with glee. In her excitement, she always dances round the wrong way, and with the wrong boy—but it's always the same wrong boy, that is what makes it extraordinary. Happy wrong boy, only he doesn't know he's happy ; he is so small. After the dance, the little boys kiss the little girls. You ought to see this little fairy turn aside and giggle, and push her little lover away. The boys are awfully shy over the business, but the little girls don't seem a bit afraid. Such is the superiority of woman over man !

“The pantomime dresses all come from London, and are quite handsome and costly. The piece is *Whittington and his Cat*, written by the stage manager here, but it is nearly all songs and dances, and what little is spoken is more gag than book. I've two songs in one of my parts, and one in the other. I suppose singing is easy enough when you are used to it. It is the orchestra that puts me out, though. I should feel much freer without the music. We give them plenty of topical allusions on burning local questions, being careful, of course, to follow Mr Pickwick's advice, and “shout with the crowd.” It fetches them

immensely. The enthusiasm created, nightly by a reference to the new lamp-post in the High Street is tremendous.

“ Our low comedian is teaching me dancing, and I practise for about an hour a day. It’s terribly hard work, but I can nearly do a hornpipe already. I want to do that: there is nothing knocks a country audience like a hornpipe.

“ The stage manager is a surly fellow, of course; but the manager himself is a brick, and treats us—the actors—with as much respect as if we were stage carpenters: and money is safe. Our leading man has never turned up, so his part has been cut out, and this has not improved the plot. I play a lazy clerk in the opening (it’s like going back to the old Civil Service days), and also prime minister of Tittattoo; having only three minutes for change. I get some legitimate fun out of the prime minister, but the clerk does not require artistic acting. I pretend to go to sleep, and then the clown, who plays another clerk, catches me over the head with a clapper, and then I wake up and catch him over the head with the clapper, and then he rushes at me and hits me, and I take the nap from him, and then he takes the nap from me

(it wakes you up, this sort of nap, I tell you), after which, we both have a grand struggle with the cat. I fell on my head the other night (lucky it wasn't any other part of me), and broke a chair in the course of this struggle. I got an encore for that, but didn't take it. I suppose you might call this knockabout business. I'm glad there are none of my friends here to see me. Acting isn't all making love in tights, and fighting with a real sword.

"We play a drama before the Panto. on Saturday next. Fancy me as the heavy father, blessing the stage manager and the leading lady, whose united ages amount to about eighty. That is what I'm going to do.

"We all dined with the manager on Christmas day at his hotel, and had a very pleasant evening, keeping it up till four. We are each of us to have a 'ben.' before leaving here. I was rather pleased at this when I heard it, but the others displayed no rapture. Our walking gent. told me he never lost less than thirty shillings at his benefits. I don't think I shall take one. You pay all expenses, and have half the receipts. The attraction about it to my mind, though, is that you can put

up what you like, and choose your own parts. I should like to have a try at Romeo.

“I have tasted fame and don't like it. I have been recognised in the street, and followed by a small crowd of children. They evidently expected me to stop at some corner and sing.

“The men's dressing-room at the theatre is up in the flies, and the only means of communication with it is by a ladder. This got removed the other night, so that our low comedian couldn't get down. We didn't know this, however, so the Lord Chamberlain went on and said, ‘Behold, your Prince approaches,’ and of course he didn't come. So the Lord Chamberlain said it again, and the house began to laugh; and then an excited voice from above cried out, ‘Shut up, you fool. Where's the ladder?’

“Must ‘shut up’ myself now, for it's half-past seven, and I'm on at eight. I'm very comfortable down here. Write soon, old chap, and give us all the news. Have you seen dear little ——?”

Oh! the rest has nothing to do with theatrical matters.

CHAPTER XI

FIRST PROVINCIAL EXPERIENCES

I THOUGHT I was safe for the summer with this company, and congratulated myself upon having found such good quarters. The glorious uncertainty of the boards, however, almost rivals that of the turf. From one reason and another, we broke up without ever going on tour, so that, two months after leaving London, I found myself back there again on my way to the opposite side of the kingdom to join another company.

But, short as was my first country engagement, it gave me a pretty good insight into what provincial work was like. The following is from one of my letters, written after about a fortnight's experience of this work, which did not begin until the pantomime was withdrawn.

“The panto. is over. I wasn't by any means

fond of it, but I'm sorry for one thing. While it was running, you see, there was no study or rehearsal, and we had the whole day free, and could—and did—enjoy ourselves. But no skating parties now! no long walks! no drives! no getting through a novel in one day! We play at least two fresh pieces every night and sometimes three. Most of them here already know their parts as well as they know their alphabet, but everything is new to me, and it is an awful grind. I can never tell until one night what I'm going to play the next. The cast is stuck up by the stage door every evening, and then, unless you happen to have the book yourself, you must borrow the stage manager's copy, and write out your part. If somebody else wants it too, and is before you, you don't get hold of it till the next morning perhaps, and that gives you about eight hours in which to work up a part of say six or seven lengths (a 'length' is forty-two lines).

“ Sometimes there's a row over the cast. Second Low Comedy isn't going to play old men. That's not his line: he was not engaged to play old men. He'll see everybody somethinged first. —First Old Man wants to know what they mean

by expecting him to play second old man's part. He has never been so insulted in his life. He has played with Kean and Macready and Phelps and Matthews, and they would none of them have dreamt of asking him to do such a thing.—Juvenile Lead has seen some rum things, but he is blowed if ever he saw the light comedy part given to the Walking Gentleman before. Anyhow, he shall decline to play the part given him, it's mere utility.—Walking Gent. says, well it really isn't his fault; he doesn't care one way or the other. He was cast for the part, and took it.—Juvenile Lead knows it isn't his fault—doesn't blame him at all—it's the stage manager he blames. Juvenile Lead's opinion is that the stage manager is a fool. Everybody agrees with him here; it is our rallying point.

“The general result, when this sort of thing occurs, is that the part in dispute, no matter what it is, gets pitched on to me as ‘Responsibles.’ There's a little too much responsibility about my line. I like the way they put it, too, when they want me to take a particularly heavy part. They call it ‘giving me an opportunity!’ If they mean an opportunity to stop up all night, I agree with

them. That is the only opportunity I see about it. Do they suppose you are going to come out with an original and scholarly conception of the character, when you see the part for the first time the night before you play it? Why, you haven't time to think of the meaning of the words you repeat. But even if you had the chance of studying a character, it would be no use. They won't let you carry out your own ideas. There seems to be a regular set of rules for each part, and you are bound to follow them. Originality is at a discount in the provinces.

"I have lived to see our stage manager snubbed—sat upon—crushed. He has been carrying on down here, and swelling around to that extent you'd have thought him a station-master at the very least. Now he's like a bladder with the air let out. His wife's come.

"The company is really getting quite familified. There are three married couples in it now. Our Low Comedian's wife is the Singing Chambermaid—an awfully pretty little woman (why have ugly men always got pretty wives?). I played her lover the other night, and we had to kiss two or three times. I rather liked it, especially as she

doesn't make-up much. It isn't at all pleasant, getting a mouthful of powder or carmine.

"I gained my first 'call' on Saturday, before a very full house. Of course I was highly delighted, but I felt terribly nervous about stepping across when the curtain was pulled back. I kept thinking, 'Suppose it's a mistake, and they don't want me.' They applauded, though, the moment I appeared, and then I was all right. It was for a low comedy part—Jacques in *The Honeymoon*. I always do better in low comedy than in anything else, and everybody tells me I ought to stick to it. But that is just what I don't want to do. It is high tragedy that I want to shine in. I don't like low comedy at all. I would rather make the people cry than laugh.

"There is one little difficulty that I have to contend with at present in playing comedy, and that is a tendency to laugh myself when I hear the house laughing. I suppose I shall get over this in time, but now, if I succeed in being at all comical, it tickles me as much as it does the audience, and, although I could keep grave enough if they didn't laugh, the moment they start I want to join in. But it is not only at my

own doings that I am inclined to laugh. Anything funny on the stage amuses me, and being mixed up in it makes no difference. I played Frank to our Low Comedian's Major de Boots the other night. He was in extra good form and very droll, and I could hardly go on with my part for laughing at him. Of course, when a piece is played often, one soon ceases to be amused; but here, where each production enjoys a run of one consecutive night only, the joke does not pall.

"There is a man in the town who has been to the theatre regularly every night since we opened. The pantomime ran a month, and he came all through that. I know I was sick enough of the thing before it was over, but what I should have been, sitting it out from beginning to end every evening, I do not like to think. Most of our patrons, though, are pretty regular customers. The theatre-going population of the town is small but determined. Well, you see, ours is the only amusement going. There was a fat woman came last week, but she did not stay long. The people here are all so fat themselves they thought nothing of her."

CHAPTER XII

“MAD MAT” TAKES ADVANTAGE OF AN OPPORTUNITY

I HAD a day in London before starting off on my next venture, and so looked in at my old theatre. I knew none of the company, but the workmen and supers were mostly the same that I had left there. Dear old Jim was in his usual state, and greeted me with a pleasant—

“Hulloa ! you seem jolly fond of the place, *you* do. What the deuce brings *you* here ? ”

I explained that it was a hankering to see him once again.

“Mad Mat” was there, too. The pantomime was still running, and Mat played a demon with a pasteboard head. He was suffering great injustice nightly, so it appeared from what he told me. He was recalled regularly at the end of the scene in which he and his brother demons were knocked

about by the low comedian, but the management would not allow him to go on again and bow.

"They are jealous," whispered Mat to me, as we strolled into *The Rodney* (it would be unprofessional for an actor to meet a human creature whose swallowing organization was intact, and not propose a drink)—jealous, that's what it is. I'm getting too popular, and they think I shall cut them out."

The poor fellow was madder than ever, and I was just thinking so at the very moment that he turned to me and said :

"Do you think I'm mad? candidly now."

It's a little awkward when a maniac asks you point-blank if you think he's mad. Before I could collect myself sufficiently to reply, he continued :

"People often say I'm mad—I've heard them. Even if I am, it isn't the thing to throw in a gentleman's teeth, but I'm not—I'm not. *You* don't think I am, do you?"

I was that "took aback," as Mrs Brown would put it, that, if I had not had the presence of mind to gulp down a good mouthful of whisky and water, I don't know what I should have done. I

then managed to get out something about "a few slight eccentricities, perhaps, but——"

"That's it," he cried, excitedly, "'eccentricities'—and they call that being mad. But they won't call me mad long—wait till I've made my name. They won't call me mad then. Mad! It's *they're* the fools, to think a man's mad when he isn't. Ha, ha, my boy, I'll surprise 'em one day. I'll shew the fools—the dolts—the idiots, who's been mad. 'Great genius is to madness close allied.' Who said that, eh? *He* was a genius, and they called *him* mad, perhaps. They're fools—all fools, I tell you. They can't tell the difference between madness and genius, but I'll shew them some day—some day."

Fortunately there was nobody else in the bar where we were, or his ravings would have attracted an unpleasant amount of attention. He wanted to give me a taste of his quality then and there in his favourite *rôle* of Romeo, and I only kept him quiet by promising to call that night and hear him rehearse the part.

When we were ready to go out, I put my hand in my pocket to pay, but, to my horror, Mat was before me, and laid down the money on the

counter. Nor would any argument induce him to take it up again. He was hurt at the suggestion even, and reminded me that I had stood treat on the last occasion—about three months ago. It was impossible to force the money on him. He was as proud on his six shillings a week as Cræsus on sixty thousand a year, and I was compelled to let him have his way. So he paid the eightpence, and then we parted on the understanding that I was to see him later on at his “lodgings.”—“They are not what I could wish,” he explained, “but you will, I am sure, overlook a few bachelor inconveniences. The place suits me well enough—for the present.”

Hearing a lunatic go through *Romeo* is not the pleasantest way of passing the night, but I should not have had pluck enough to disappoint the poor fellow, even if I had not promised, and, accordingly, after having spent the evening enjoying the unusual luxury of sitting quiet, and seeing other people excite themselves for *my* amusement, I made my way to the address Mat had given me.

The house was in a narrow court at the back of the New Cut. The front door stood wide open, though it was twelve o'clock, and a bitterly cold

night. A child lay huddled up on the doorstep, and a woman was sleeping in the passage. I stumbled over the woman, groping my way along in the dark. She seemed used to be trodden upon though, for she only looked up unconcernedly, and went to sleep again at once. Mat had told me his place was at the very top, so I went on until there were no more stairs, and then I looked round me. Seeing a light coming from one of the rooms, I peered in through the half-open door, and saw a fantastic object, decked in gaudy colours and with long flowing hair, sitting on the edge of a broken-down bedstead. I didn't know what to make of it at first, but it soon occurred to me that it must be Mat, fully made up as Romeo, and I went in.

I thought, when I had seen him a few hours before, that he looked queer—even for him—but now, his haggard face daubed with paint, and his great eyes staring out of it more wildly than ever, he positively frightened me. He held out his hand, which was thin and white, but remained seated.

“Excuse my rising,” he said slowly, in a weak voice, “I feel so strange. I don't think I can go through the part to night. So sorry to have

brought you here for nothing, but you must come and see me some other time."

I got him to lie down on the bed just as he was, and covered him with the old rags that were on it. He lay still for a few minutes, then he looked up and said:

"I won't forget you, L——, when I'm well off. You've been friendly to me when I was poor: I shan't forget it, my boy. My opportunity will soon come now—very soon, and then——"

He didn't finish the sentence, but began to murmur bits of the part to himself, and in a little while he dropped asleep. I stole softly out, and went in search of a doctor. I got hold of one at last, and returned with him to Mat's attic. He was still asleep, and after arranging matters as well as I could with the doctor, I left, for I had to be on my way early in the morning.

I never expected to see Mat again, and I never did. People who have lived for any length of time on six shillings a week don't take long to die when they set about it, and two days after I had seen him, Mad Mat's opportunity came, and he took it.

CHAPTER XIII

LODGINGS AND LANDLADIES

THEY charged me extra for the basket on the Great Eastern Line, and I have hated that company ever since. Of course it was over weight, but actors are good customers to the railways, and a little excess luggage is not, as a rule, too closely inquired into. The myrmidons at Bishopsgate, however, were inexorable. It was in vain I tried to persuade them that the thing was "as light as a feather." They insisted on sticking it up edgeways on a shaky iron plate, and wobbling something up and down a bar ; afterwards giving me an absurd bit of paper with "4s. 4d." on it, which, I explained, I didn't want, but which they charged me for just as though I had specially ordered it.

My destination was a small market town in the eastern counties, where I arrived about mid-day.

It was the most dead and alive place I have ever been to. All eastern county towns are more or less dead and alive—particularly the former—but this one was dreariness personified. Not a soul was to be seen outside the station. In the yard stood a solitary cab to which was attached a limp horse that, with head hanging down and knees bent out, looked the picture of resigned misery; but the driver had disappeared—washed away by the rain, perhaps, which was pouring steadily down. I left my belongings in the cloak room, and walked straight to the theatre. I passed two or three green posters on my way, headed "Theatre Royal," and setting forth that "——, the World-Renowned Tragedian from Drury Lane," would give his magnificent impersonations of *Richard III.* and *The Idiot Witness* that night, and begging the inhabitants, for their own sakes, to "come early." I found the whole company assembled on the stage, and looking as dismal as the town itself. They all had colds in the head, including the manager, "the World-Renowned Tragedian from Drury Lane," who had the face-ache into the bargain.

After a rough and ready rehearsal of the

tragedy, melodrama, and burlesque to be played that evening (I had had all my parts sent me by post before joining), I started off by myself to look for lodgings, as I had come to the conclusion that my own society would, on the whole, be less depressing than that of any gentleman in the company.

Lodging hunting is by no means the most pleasant business connected with touring. It always means an hour or two's wandering up and down back streets, squinting up at windows, knocking at doors, and waiting about on doorsteps. You are under the impression all the while that the entire street is watching you and that it has put you down as either a begging letter impostor, or else as the water-rate man, and despises you accordingly. You never find the place that suits you until you have been everywhere else. If you could only begin at the end and work backwards, the search would be over at once. But, somehow or other, you can never manage to do this, and you have always to go through the same routine. First of all, there are the places that ask about twice as much as you are prepared to give, and at which you promise to call again when you have seen

your friend. Then there are the places that are just taken, or just going to be taken, or just not to be taken. There are the places where you can have half a bed with another gentleman, the other gentleman generally being the billiard-marker at the hotel opposite, or some journeyman photographer. There are the people who won't take you because you are not a married couple, and the people who won't take you because you are a play-actor, and the people who want you to be out all day, and the people who want you to be in by ten. Added to these, there is the slatternly woman, who comes to the door, followed by a mob of dirty children, that cling to her skirts and regard you with silent horror, evidently thinking that the "big ugly man," so often threatened, has really come this time. Or the fool of a husband, who scratches his head and says you had better call again, when his "missus" is in. Or, most aggravating of all, the woman who stands on the step, after you have gone, and watches you down the street, so that you don't like to knock anywhere else.

All this I was prepared for when I started, but no such ordeal was in store for me. The difficulty

of selecting lodgings was got rid of altogether in the present case by there simply being no lodgings of any kind to be let. It had evidently never occurred to the inhabitants of this delightful spot that any human being could possibly desire to lodge there, and I don't wonder at it. There were a couple of inns in the High Street, but country actors cannot afford inns however moderate, and of "Furnished Apartments" or "Bed Rooms for Single Gentlemen" there were none. I explored every street in the town without coming across a single bill, and then, as a last resource, I went into a baker's shop to inquire. I don't know why bakers should be better acquainted than any other tradesmen with the private affairs of their neighbours, but that they are has always been my impression, or, at least, *had* been up till then, when it received a rude blow. I asked two bakers, and both of them shook their heads, and knew of no one who let lodgings. I was in despair, and the High Street, when I glanced up and saw a very pleasant face smiling at me from the door of a milliner's shop. Somehow, the sight of it inspired me with hope. I smiled back, and—

“Could the owner of the pleasant face recommend me to any lodgings?”

The owner of the pleasant face looked surprised. “Was Monsieur going to stop in the town?”

On Monsieur explaining that he was an actor, Madame was delighted, and smiled more pleasantly than ever. “Madame did so love the theatre. Had not been to one for, oh! so long time; not since she did leave Regent Street—the Regent Street that was in our London. Did Monsieur know London? Had been to heaps and heaps of theatres then. And at Paris. Ah, Paris! Ah, the theatres at Paris! Ah! But there was nothing to go to here. It was so quiet, so stupid, this town. We English, we did seem so dull. Monsieur, son mari, he did not mind it. He had been born here. He did love the sleepiness—the what we did call the monotony. But Madame, she did love the gaiety. This place was, oh, so sad.”

Here Madame clasped her hands—pretty little hands they were, too—and looked so piteous, that Monsieur felt strongly inclined to take her in his arms and comfort her. He, however, on second thoughts restrained his generous impulse.

Madame then stated her intention to go to the theatre that very evening, and requested to know what was to be played.

On Monsieur informing her that “——, the World-Renowned Tragedian from Drury Lane, would give his magnificent impersonations of *Richard III.* and *The Idiot Witness*,” she seemed greatly impressed, and hoped it was a comedy. Madame loved comedies. “To laugh at all the fun—to be made merry—that was so good.”

Monsieur thought that Madame would have plenty to laugh at in the magnificent impersonations of *Richard III.* and *The Idiot Witness*, even if she found the burlesque a little heavy, but he didn't say so.

Then Madame remembered Monsieur was looking for lodgings. Madame put the top of her forefinger in her mouth, puckered her brows, and looked serious. “Yes, there was Miss Kemp, she had sometimes taken a lodger. But Miss Kemp was so strict, so particular. She did want every one to be so good. Was Monsieur good?” This with a doubting smile.

Monsieur hazarded the opinion that having gazed into Madame's eyes for five minutes was

enough to make a saint of any man. Monsieur's opinion was laughed at, but, nevertheless notwithstanding, Miss Kemp's address was given him, and thither he repaired, armed with the recommendation of his charming little French friend.

Miss Kemp was an old maid, and lived by herself in a small three-cornered house that stood in a grass-grown courtyard behind the church. She was a prim old lady, with quick eyes and a sharp chin. She looked me up and down with two jerks of her head, and then supposed that I had come to the town to work.

"No," I replied, "I had come to play. I was an actor."

"Oh," said Miss Kemp. Then added severely, "You're married."

I repudiated that insinuation with scorn.

After that, the old lady asked me inside, and we soon became friends. I can always get on with old ladies. Next to young ones, I like them better than any other class of the community. And Miss Kemp was a very nice old lady. She was as motherly as a barnyard hen, though she was an old maid. I suggested going out again to

buy a chop for my tea, and to fetch my basket, but she wouldn't hear of it.

"Bless the child," said she, "do run and take off those wet boots. I'll send some one for your luggage."

So I was made to take off my coat and boots, and to sit by the fire, with my feet wrapped up in a shawl, while Miss Kemp bustled about with toast and steaks, and rattled the tea-things and chatted.

I only stopped a week with Miss Kemp, that being the length of time the company remained in the town, but it will be a long while before I forget the odd little old maid with her fussy ways and kindly heart. I can still see, in memory, the neat kitchen with its cheerful fire in polished grate, before which sleek purring Tom lies stretched. The old-fashioned lamp burns brightly on the table, and, between it and the fire, sits the little old lady herself in her high-backed chair, her knitting in her hands and her open Bible on her knee. As I recall the picture, so may it still be now, and so may it still remain for many a year to come.

I must have been singularly fortunate in regard

to landladies, or else they are a very much maligned class. I have had a good deal to do with them, and, on the whole, I have found them kind, obliging, and the very reverse of extortionate. With country landladies, especially, I have ever been most comfortable ; and even among London ones, who, as a class, are not so pleasant as their provincial sisters, I have never, as yet, come across a single specimen of that terrible she-dragon about which I have heard so much. To champion the cause of landladies is rather an extraordinary proceeding, but, as so much is said against them, I think it only fair to state my own experience. They have their faults. They bully the slavey (but then the slavey sauces them, so perhaps it is only tit for tat), they will fry chops, and they talk enough for an Irish M.P. They persist in telling you all their troubles, and they keep you waiting for your breakfast while they do it. They never tire of recounting to you all they have done for some ungrateful relative, and they bring down a drawerful of letters on the subject, which they would like you to cast your eye through. They bore you to death every day, too, with a complete record of the sayings and

doings of some immaculate young man lodger they once had. This young man appears to have been quite overweighted with a crushing sense of the goodness of the landlady in question. Many and many a time has he said to her, with tears in his eyes: "Ah, Mrs. So-and-so, you have been more than a mother to me"; and then he has pressed her hand, and felt he could never repay her kindness. Which seems to have been the fact, for he has generally gone off, in the end, owing a pretty considerable sum.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH A STOCK COMPANY

I WAS most miserable with the company I had now joined. What it was like may be gathered from the following :—

“DEAR JIM,—If I stop long with this company I shall go mad (not very far to go, perhaps you'll say !). I must get out of it soon. It's the most wretched affair you could possibly imagine. Crummles's show was a *Comédie Française* in its arrangements compared with this. We have neither stage-manager nor acting manager. If this were all, I shouldn't grumble ; but we have to do our own bill posting, help work the scenes, and take the money at the doors—not an arduous task, this last. There are no 'lines.' We are all 'responsible,' and the parts are distributed among us with the utmost impartiality. In the matter of

salary, too, there is the same charming equality: we all get a guinea. In theory, that is: in reality, our salaries vary according to our powers of nagging; the maximum ever attained by any one having been fifteen shillings. I wonder we get any, though, considering the audiences we play to. The mere sight of the house gives one the horrors every night. It is so dimly lighted (for, to save expense, the gas is only turned a quarter on) that you can hardly see your way about, and so empty, that every sound echoes and re-echoes through the place, till it seems as though a dozen people are talking in a scene where there are only two. You walk on the stage, and there in front of you are, say, twenty people dotted about the pit, a few more are lolling listlessly over the gallery rails, and there are two or three little groups in the boxes, while, as a background to these patches of unhappy humanity, there stare out the bare boards and the dingy upholstery. It is impossible to *act* among such surroundings as these. All you can do is to just drag through your part, and the audience, who one and all have evidently been regretting from the very first that they ever came—a fact they do not even attempt to disguise—are

as glad when it is over as you are. We stop a week in each town and play the same pieces, so, of course, there is no study or rehearsal now. But I wish there were ; anything would be better than this depressing monotony.

“ I might have guessed what sort of a company it was by his sending me the parts he did. I play Duncan, Banquo, Seyton, and a murderer in *Macbeth* ; Tybalt and the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* ; and Laertes, Osric, and the Second Player in *Hamlet*—and so on all through. None of us play less than two parts in the same piece. No sooner are we killed or otherwise disposed of as one person, than we are up again as somebody else, and that almost before we have time to change our clothes. I sometimes have to come on as an entirely new party with no other change than the addition of a beard. It puts me in mind of the nigger who borrowed his master's hat with the idea of passing himself off as ‘ one of them white folk.’ I should think that if the audience—when there are any—attempt to understand the play, they must have a lively time of it ; and if they are at all acquainted with our National Bard, they must be still more puzzled. We have improved so on the

originals, that the old gentleman himself would never recognise them. They are one-third Shakespeare, and two-thirds the Renowned Tragedian from Drury Lane.

“Of course, I have not had my railway fare, which I was promised after joining, and I’ve given up asking for it now. . . .”

I got a chance of changing my quarters after a few weeks, and I need scarcely say I jumped at it. We passed through a big town that was the headquarters of an established circuit company, and, hearing that one of their “responsibles” had just left I went straight to the manager, offered myself, and was accepted. Of course, in the usual way, I ought to have given a fortnight’s notice to the other manager, but, under the circumstances, this could hardly have been insisted upon. So I made the Renowned Tragedian from Drury Lane a present of all the arrears of salary he owed me—at which generosity on my part we both grinned—and left him at once. I don’t think he was very sorry. It saved him a few shillings weekly, for my place was filled by one of the orchestra, that body being thereby reduced to two.

The company of which I was now a member was one of the very few stock companies then remaining in the provinces. The touring system had fairly set in by this time, and had, as a consequence, driven out the old theatrical troupes that used to act on from year to year within the same narrow circle, and were looked upon as one of the institutions of the half-dozen towns they visited. I am not going to discuss here the rival merits or demerits of the two systems. There are advantages and disadvantages to be urged on both sides, not only from the "school" point of view, but also as regards the personal interests and comforts of the actor. I will merely say, with reference to the latter part of the question, that I myself preferred the bustle and change of touring. Indeed, in spite of all the attending anxieties and troubles, it was in this constant change—this continual shifting of the panorama of scenes and circumstances by which I was surrounded—that, for me, the chief charm of stage life lay. Change of any kind is always delightful to youth ; whether in big things or in little ones. We have not been sufficiently seasoned by disappointment in the past, then, to be sceptical as to all favours the Future may be holding

for us in her hand. A young man looks upon every change as a fresh chance. Fancy paints a more glowing fortune for each new departure, and at every turn in the road he hopes to burst upon his goal.

At each new town I went to, and with each new company I joined, new opportunities for the display of my talents would arise. The genius that one public had ignored, another would recognise and honour. In minor matters, too, there was always pleasant expectation. Agreeable companions and warm friends might be awaiting me in a new company, the lady members might be extraordinarily lovely, and money might be surer. The mere travelling, the seeing strange towns and country, the playing in different theatres, the staying in different lodgings, the occasional passing through London and looking in at home, all added to the undoubted delight I felt in this sort of life, and fully reconciled me to its many annoyances.

But being fixed in a dull country town for about six months at a stretch, with no other recreation than a game of cards, or a gossip in an inn parlour, I didn't find it at all pleasant. To the staid,

or to the married members, I daresay it was satisfactory enough. They had, some of them, been born in the company, and had been married in the company, and they hoped to die in the company. They were known throughout the circuit. They took an interest in the towns, and the towns took an interest in them, and came to their benefits. They returned again and again to the same lodgings. There was no fear of their forgetting where they lived, as sometimes happened to a touring actor on his first day in a new town. They were not unknown vagabonds wandering houseless from place to place; they were citizens and townsmen, living among their friends and relations. Every stick of furniture in their rooms was familiar to them. Their lodgings were not mere furnished apartments, but "home," or as near to a home as a country player could ever expect to get. No doubt they, as Madame would have said, "did love the sleepiness;" but I, an energetic young bachelor, found it "oh! so sad."

Sad as I might have thought it though, I stayed there five months, during which time I seem to have written an immense number of letters to the

long-suffering Jim. All that is worth recording here, however, is contained in the following extracts:—

“ . . . The work is not so hard now. It was very stiff at first, as we changed the bill about every other night, but I got hold of the *répertoire* and studied up all the parts I knew I should have to play. It still comes heavy when there is a benefit, especially when anything modern is put up, as, then, having a good wardrobe, I generally get cast for the ‘gentlemanly party,’ and that is always a lengthy part. But what makes it still more difficult, is the way everybody gags. Nobody speaks by the book here. They equivocate, and then I am undone. I never know where I am. The other day, I had a particularly long part given me to play the next evening. I stayed up nearly all night over it. At rehearsal in the morning, the light-comedy, with whom I was principally concerned, asked me how I’d got on. ‘Well, I think I shall know something about it,’ I answered. ‘At all events, I’ve got the cues perfect.’ Oh! don’t bother yourself about cues,’ replied he, cheerfully. ‘You won’t get a blessed

cue from me. I use my own words now. Just you look out for the sense.'

"I did look out for the sense, but I'll be hanged if I could see any in what he said. There was no doubt as to the words being his own. How I got through with it I don't know. He helped me with suggestions when I stuck, such as: 'Go on, let off your bit about a father,' or 'Have you told me what Sarah said?'

"Get me a pair of second-hand tights at Stinchcombe's, will you, and have them washed and sent down. Any old things will do. I only want them to wear underneath others. I have to appear in black tights next Monday. They make your legs look so awfully thin, and I'm not too stout in those parts as it is.

"I have got hold of an invaluable pair of boots (well, so they ought to be, I paid fifteen shillings for them). Pulled up to their full height, they reach nearly to the waist, and are a pair of American jack-boots; doubled in round the calf, and with a bit of gold lace and a tassel pinned on, they are hessians; with painted tops instead of the gold lace and tassel, they are hunting boots; and wrinkled down about the ankle, and stuck out

round the top, they are either Charles or Cromwell, according to whether they are ornamented with lace and a bow, or left plain. You have to keep a sharp eye on them, though, for they have a habit of executing changes on their own account unbeknown to you, so that while one of your legs is swaggering about as a highwayman, the other is masquerading as a cavalier. We dress the pieces very well indeed here. There is an excellent wardrobe belonging to the theatre.

“I do wish it were possible to get the programmes made out by intelligent men, instead of by acting-managers. If they do ever happen, by some strange accident, not to place your name opposite the wrong character, they put you down for a part that never existed; and if they get the other things right, they spell your name wrong.

“I say, here’s a jolly nice thing, you know; they’ve fined me half a crown for not attending rehearsal. Why, I was there all the while, only I was over the way, and when I came back they had finished. That’s our fool of a prompter, that is; he knew where I was. I’ll serve him out.”

CHAPTER XV

REVENGE

MORE extracts :—

“ . . . I'm afraid I shall have to trouble you to get me another wig. I thought my own hair would do for modern juvenile parts, but it isn't considered light enough. 'Be virtuous, and you will have hair the colour of tow,' seems to be the basis of the whole theatrical religion. I wish I could be as economical in wigs as our First Old Man is. He makes one do for everything. He wears it the right way when he is a serious old man, and hind part foremost when he wants to be funny.

“ Talking of wigs puts me in mind of an accident our manager had the other night. He is over fifty, but he fancies he is a sort of Charles Matthews, and will play young parts. So on Saturday evening he came on as the lover in an

old English comedy, wearing one of those big three-cornered hats. 'Who is that handsome young man with the fair hair?' says the heroine to her confidante. 'Oh, that, why that is Sir Harry Monfort, the gallant young gentleman who saved the Prince's life. He is the youngest officer in the camp, but already the most famous.' 'Brave boy,' murmurs the heroine; 'I would speak a word with him. Call him hither, Leonora.' So Leonora called him thither, and up he skipped. When the heroine spoke to him, he was quite overcome with boyish bashfulness. 'Ah, madam,' sighed he, taking off his hat and making a sweeping bow—'What the devil's the matter? What are they laughing at? Oh my——'

"He had taken his wig off with his hat, and there was the 'brave boy's' poor old bald head exposed to the jeers of a ribald house.

"I'd half a mind to rush up to town last week. I was out of the bill for three nights running. But the mere railway fare would have cost me nearly half a week's salary, so I contented myself with a trip over to R—— and a look in at the show there. I met W——. He's married little Polly ——, who was walking lady at ——. She

is up at Aberdeen now, and he hasn't seen her for over three months. Rather rough on a young couple who haven't been married a year. The old ones bear up against this sort of thing very well indeed, but poor W—— is quite upset about it. They kept together as long as they could, but business got so bad that they had to separate, and each take the first thing that offered. . . .”

“You remember my telling you how our prompter got me fined for not attending a rehearsal some time ago. I said I would serve him out, and so I have. Or rather *we* have—I and one of the others who had a score against him—for he's a bumptious, interfering sort of fellow, and makes himself disagreeable to everybody. He is awful spoons on a Miss Pinkeen, whose father keeps an ironmonger's shop next door to the theatre. The old man knows nothing about it, and they are up to all kinds of dodges to get a word with each other. Now, one of our dressing-room windows is exactly opposite their staircase window, and he and the girl often talk across; and, once or twice, he has placed a plank between the two windows, and crawled along it into the

house when her father has been away. Well, we got hold of a bit of this girl's writing the other day, and forged a letter to him, saying that her father had gone out, and that she wanted to see him very particularly, and that he was to come over through the window and wait on the landing till she came up stairs. Then, just before rehearsal, we went out and gave a stray boy twopence to take it in to him.

“Of course, no sooner did we see that he was fairly inside the house, and out of sight, than we pulled the board in and shut our window. It got quite exciting on the stage as time went by. ‘Where’s ——?’ fumed the stage manager. ‘Where the devil’s ——? It’s too bad of him to keep us all waiting like this.’ And then the call-boy was sent round to four public houses, and then to his lodgings; for he had got the book in his pocket, and we couldn’t begin without him. ‘Oh, it’s too bad of him to go away and stop like this,’ cried the stage manager again at the end of half an hour. ‘I’ll fine him five shillings for this. I won’t be played the fool with.’ In about an hour, he came in looking thunder and lightning. He wouldn’t give any explanation. All we could get

out of him was, that if he could find out who'd done it, he'd jolly well wring his neck.

"From what the ironmonger's boy told our call-boy, it seems that he waited about three-quarters of an hour on the stairs, not daring to move, and that then the old man came up and wanted to know what he was doing there. There was a regular scene in the house, and the girl has sworn that she'll never speak to him again for getting her into a row, and about four of her biggest male relatives have each expressed a firm determination to break every bone in his body; and the boy adds, that from his knowledge of them they are to be relied upon. We have thought it our duty to let him know these things."

I find nothing further of any theatrical interest, until I come to the following, written about four months after the date of my entering the company:—

"I was far too busy to write last week. It's been something awful. We've got ——* down here for a fortnight. His list consists of eighteen pieces

* A "Star" from London.

—eight ‘legitimate,’ five dramas, four comedies, and a farce ; and we only had a week in which to prepare. There have been rehearsals at ten, and rehearsals at three, and rehearsals at eleven, after the performance was over. First, I took all the parts given me, and studied them straight off one after the other. Then I found I’d got them all jumbled up together in my head, and the more I tried to remember what belonged to which, the more I forgot which belonged to what. At rehearsal I talked Shakspeare in the farce, and put most of the farce and a selection from all the five dramas into one of the comedies. And then the stage manager went to put me right, and then *he* got mixed up, and wanted to know if anybody could oblige him by informing him what really was being rehearsed ; and the Leading Lady and the First Low Comedy said it was one of the dramas, but the Second Low Comedy, the Soubrette, and the Leader of the orchestra would have it was a comedy, while the rest of us were too bewildered to be capable of forming any opinion on any subject.

“ The strain has so upset me, that I don’t even now know whether I’m standing on my head or

my heels ; and our First Old Man—but I'll come to him later on. My work has been particularly heavy, for, in consequence of a serious accident that has happened to our Walking Gentleman, I've had to take his place. He was playing a part in which somebody—the Heavy Man—tries to stab him while he's asleep. But just when the would-be murderer has finished soliloquising, and the blow is about to fall, he starts up, and a grand struggle ensues. I think the other fellow must have been drunk on the last occasion. Anyhow, the business was most clumsily managed, and R——, our Walking Gent., got his eye cut out, and is disfigured for life. It is quite impossible for him now to play his old line, and he has to do heavies or low comedy, or anything where appearance is of no importance. The poor fellow is terribly cut up—don't think I'm trying to make a ghastly joke—and he seems to be especially bitter against me for having slipped into his shoes. I'm sure he need not be ; whatever good his ill wind has blown me has brought with it more work than it's worth ; and I think, on the whole, taking this star business into consideration, I would rather have stopped where I was. I knew a good many

of the parts I should have had to play, but as it is, everything has been fresh study.

“ Well, I was going to tell you about our old man. He had always boasted that he hadn’t studied for the last ten years. I don’t know what particular merit there was in this, that he should have so prided himself upon it, but that he considered it as highly clever on his part there could not be the slightest doubt ; and he had even got to quite despise any one who did study. You can imagine his feelings, therefore, when sixteen long parts, eleven at least of which he had never seen before, were placed in his hand, with a request that he would be letter perfect in all by the following Thursday. It was observed that he didn’t say much at the time. He was a garrulous old gentleman as a rule, but, after once glancing over the bundle, he grew thoughtful and abstracted, and did not join in the chorus of curses loud and deep which was being sung with great vigour by the rest of the company. The only person to whom he made any remark was myself, who happened to be standing by the stage-door when he was going out. He took the bundle of parts out of his pocket, and showed them to me. ‘ Nice little lot,

that—ain't it?' he said. 'I'll just go home and study them all up—that's what I'll do.' Then he smiled—a sad, wan smile—and went slowly out.

"That was on Saturday evening, and on Monday morning we met at ten for rehearsal. We went on without the old man until eleven, and then, as he hadn't turned up, and was much wanted, the boy was despatched to his lodgings to see if he were there. We waited patiently for another quarter of an hour, and then the boy returned.

"The old man had not been seen since Sunday.

"His landlady had left him in the morning, looking over the 'parts,' and when she returned in the evening, he was gone. A letter, addressed to her, had been found in his room, and this she had given the boy to take back with him.

"The stage manager took it and hurriedly opened it. At the first glance, he started and uttered an exclamation of horror; and when he had finished it, it dropped from his hand, and he sank down in the nearest chair, dazed and bewildered, like a man who has heard, but cannot yet grasp, some terrible news.

"A cold, sickly feeling came over me. The

strange, far-away look, and the quiet, sad smile that I had last seen on the old man's face came back to me with startling vividness, and with a new and awful meaning. He was old and enfeebled. He had not the elastic vigour of youth that can bear up under worry and work. His mind, to all seeming, had never at any time been very powerful. Had the sudden and heavy call upon its energies actually unhinged it? and had the poor old fellow in some mad moment taken up arms against his sea of troubles, and by opposing ended them? Was he now lying in some shady copse, with a gaping wound from ear to ear, or sleeping his last sleep with the deep waters for a coverlet? Was what lay before me a message from the grave? These thoughts flashed like lightning through my brain as I darted forward and picked the letter up. It ran as follows :—

“ ‘ Dear Mrs Hopsam,—I’m off to London by the 3.30, and shan’t come back. I’ll write and let you know where to send my things. I left a pair of boots at Jupp’s to have the toe-caps sewn—please get ’em ; and there was a night-shirt short last week—it’s got a D on it. If they send from the theatre, tell them to go to the devil ; and if they want sixteen parts

studied in a week, they'd better get a cast-iron actor. Yours truly, D——.

“This was a great relief to me, but it didn't seem to have soothed the stage manager much. When he recovered from his amazement, he said what he thought of the old man, which I will not repeat. There was a deuce of a row, I can tell you. Our Leading Man, who had consoled himself for being temporarily ousted from his proper position by the thought of having nothing to do all the time, and being able to go in front each night and sneer at the ‘star,’ had to take the First Old Man's place, and a pretty temper he's in about it. It's as much as one's life's worth now, even, to sneak a bit of his colour. Another old man joins us after next week, but of course that is just too late for the hard work. —— will be gone then. . . .”

CHAPTER XVI

VIEWS ON ACTING

I QUOTE from two more letters, and then I have done with this stock company. The first was written just after our star had set,—or rather gone to the next town,—the second about a fortnight later :—

“ . . . — left on Saturday. We had crowded houses all the time he was with us, and I'm not surprised. It must have been a treat to these benighted provincials to see real acting. No wonder country people don't care much for theatres, seeing the wretched horse-play presented to them under the name of acting. It does exasperate me to hear people talking all that thundering nonsense about the provinces being such a splendid school for young actors. Why a couple of months of it is enough to kill any idea of acting a man may have started with. Even if you had

time to think of anything but how to gabble through your lines, it would be of no use. You would never be allowed to carry out any ideas of your own. If you attempted to *think*, you would be requested to look out for another shop at once. The slightest naturalness or originality would be put down to ignorance. You must walk through each part by the beaten track of rule and tradition—and such rule and tradition! The rule of Richardson's Show, the tradition of some ranting inn-yard hack. To reach the standard of dramatic art in the provinces, you have to climb down, not up. Comedy consists in having a red nose, and tumbling about the stage; being pathetic makes you hoarse for an hour after; and as for tragedy! no one dare attempt that who hasn't the lungs of a politician.

“But —— changed all that for us. He infused a new spirit into everybody, and, when he was on the stage, the others acted better than I should ever have thought they could have done. It is the first time I have played with any one who can properly be called an actor, and it was quite a new sensation, I could myself tell that I was acting very differently to the way in which I

usually act. I seemed to catch his energy and earnestness; the scene grew almost real, and I began to *feel* my part. And that is the most any one can do on the stage. As to 'being the character you are representing,' that is absurd. I can hardly believe in any sane person seriously putting forward such a suggestion. It is too ridiculous to argue against. Picture to yourself a whole company forgetting they were merely acting, and all fancying themselves the people they were impersonating. Words and business would of course be out of the question. They would all say and do just what came natural to them, and just *when* it came natural; so that sometimes everybody would be talking at once, and at other times there would be nobody doing anything. Such enthusiasm as theirs would never bow to the pitiful requirements of stage illusion. They would walk over the footlights on to the heads of the orchestra, and they would lean up against the mountains in the background. It would be a grand performance, but it wouldn't last long. The police would have to be called in before the first act was over. If they were not, the Leading Man would slaughter half the other members of the

company ; the Juvenile Lead would run off with the Walking Lady and the property jewels ; and the First Old Man would die of a broken heart. What the manager would do on the second night I don't know. If he opened at all, I suppose he would go in front and explain matters by saying :—

“ ‘ Ladies and Gentlemen,—I must apologise for the incompleteness with which the play will be presented to you this evening. The truth is, the performance last night was so realistic all round, that there is only the Low Comedy and a General Utility left. But we've a good many corpses about the theatre, and with these, and the assistance of the two gentlemen mentioned, we will do what we can.’ ”

“ Even when studying in one's own room, one cannot for a moment lose sight of one's identity. A great actor, creating a character, doesn't forget he's himself, and think he's somebody else. It's only lunatics who have those fancies. But he is a man of such vast sympathy that he can understand and enter into all human thoughts and feelings ; and, having pictured to himself the character of the man he wishes to represent, he

can follow the workings of that supposed man's mind under all possible circumstances.

"But even this sympathy must be left outside the theatre doors. Once inside, the mind must be kept clear of all distracting thoughts. What is gone through on the stage is merely an exact repetition of what is conceived in the study, and a cool head and a good memory are the only reliable servants when once the curtain is up. Of course a man should *feel* what he is acting. Feeling is the breath of acting. It is to the actor what Aphrodite's gift was to Pygmalion—it gives life to his statue. But this feeling is as much a matter of memory as the rest. The actual stage is too artificial for emotion to come to one naturally while there. Each passion is assumed and dropped by force of will, together with the words and action which accompany it. . . ."

". . . I made a sensation here last Tuesday. I was playing the very part in which our Walking Gentleman met with his accident, and he was playing the villain, who tries to stab me while I am asleep. (The Heavy Man has left. He went soon after he had done the mischief.) Well, everything had gone very smoothly so far, and I

was lying there on the couch at the back of the darkened stage, and he was leaning over me, with the knife in his hand. I was quite still, waiting for my cue to awake, and wondering if I could manage to start up quickly, when I raised my eyes and caught sight of R——'s face. I may have done him an injustice. His expression may have been mere acting. The whole idea was, perhaps, due to nothing but my own imagination. I have thought this since. At the time it flashed across me: 'He means to revenge himself on me for having taken his place. He is going to disfigure me just as he was disfigured.' In an instant I had sprung up and wrested the knife from his hand.

"We stood there looking at one another, and neither of us moved or spoke: he, livid underneath his colour, and trembling from head to foot. How long we kept in that position I do not know, for the thud of the curtain upon the stage was the first thing that recalled me to myself. Up to when I had snatched the knife from him, all had been in exact accordance with the book. After that, I should have held him down by the throat, and made a speech of about eight lines. I think our impromptu tableau was more effective.

“There was immense applause, and everybody congratulated me on my success. ‘I suppose you know you cut out the end,’ said the manager; ‘but never mind that. I daresay you were a little nervous, and you acted splendidly, my boy.’

“I didn’t say it wasn’t acting, and neither did R—— . . .”

I left here to join a small touring company as Juvenile Lead. I looked upon the offer as a grand opportunity at the time, and, following Horace’s * advice, grasped it by the forelock. I, therefore, one Sunday morning packed my basket, went round the town and shook hands with everybody—not without a pang of regret, for there are few human beings we can be with for any length of time and not be sorry to say good-bye to—and then, as the bright summer’s sun was setting and the church bells beginning to peal, I steamed away, or rather the engine did, and the city and its people faded out of my sight, and out of my life.

Sunday is the great travelling day for actors.

* Not quite sure whose advice this is. Have put it down to Horace to avoid contradiction.

It loses them no time. A company can finish at one town on the Saturday night, and wake up on the Monday morning in the next, ready to get everything ship-shape for the evening. Or an actor can leave one show and join another at the other end of the kingdom without missing a single performance. I have known a man play in Cornwall on the Saturday, and at Inverness on the following Monday. But convenient though it is in this respect, in every other, Sunday travelling is most unpleasant, and, for their gratification, I can assure strict Sabbatarians that it brings with it its own punishment.

Especially to a man with a conscience—an article which, in those early days, I was unfortunate enough to possess. A conscience is a disagreeable sort of thing to have with one at any time. It has a nasty disposition—a cantankerous, fault-finding, interfering disposition. There is nothing sociable about it. It seems to take a pleasure in making itself objectionable, and in rendering its owner as uncomfortable as possible. During these Sunday journeys, it used to vex me by every means in its power. If any mild old gentleman, stiting opposite me in the carriage,

raised his eyes and looked at me, I immediately fancied he was silently reproaching me, and I felt ashamed and miserable. It never occurred to me at the time that he was every bit as bad as I was, and that I had as much right to be shocked at him as he to be horrified at me. Then I used to ask myself what my poor aunt would say if she could see me. Not that it was of the slightest consequence what the old lady would have said, but the question was just one of those petty annoyances in which a mean-spirited conscience delights. I was firmly convinced that everybody was pointing the finger of scorn at me. I don't know which particular finger is the finger of scorn: whichever it is, that, I felt, was the one that was pointed at me. At every station, my exasperating inward monitor would whisper to me: "But for such abandoned wretches as you, all those porters and guards would be sleeping peacefully in the village church." When the whistle sounded, my tormentor would add: "But for you and other such despicable scoundrels, that grimy, toil-stained engine-driver would be dressed in his best clothes, lounging up against a post at his own street corner." Such thoughts maddened me.

My fellow-passengers generally let on that they were going to see sick relatives, and I would have done the same if it hadn't been for that awful basket of mine. But the inventive faculty of a newspaper reporter couldn't have explained away a basket the size of an average chest of drawers. I might have said that it contained a few delicacies for the invalid, but nobody would have believed me, and there would have been a good lie wasted.

But it is not only to people with consciences that Sunday travelling presents vexations. Even you, my dear reader, would find it unpleasant. There is a subdued going-to-a-funeral air about the whole proceeding, which makes you melancholy in spite of yourself. You miss the usual bustling attributes of railway travelling. No crowded platforms! no piles of luggage! no newspaper boys! The refreshment rooms don't seem the same places at all, and the damsels there are haughtier than ever. When you arrive at your destination, you seem to have come to a city of the dead. You pass through deserted streets to your hotel. Nobody is about. You go into the coffee-room and sit down there by yourself.

After a while the boots looks in. You yearn towards him as towards a fellow-creature. You would fall upon his neck, and tell him all your troubles, You try to engage him in conversation, so as to detain him in the room, for you dread to be left alone again. But he doesn't enter into your feelings: he answers all questions by monosyllables, and gets away as quickly as possible. You go out for a walk. The streets are dark and silent, and you come back more miserable than you started. You order supper, but have no appetite, and cannot eat it when it comes. You retire to your room early, but cannot go to sleep. You lie there and wonder what the bill will come to, and, while thinking of this, you are softly borne away into the land of dreams, and fancy that the proprietor has asked you for a hundred and eighty-seven pounds nine and fourpence ha'peny, and that you have killed him on the spot, and left the house in your nightshirt without paying.

CHAPTER XVII

I JOIN A "FIT-UP"

THE show which I now graced with my presence was a "fit-up." I didn't know this beforehand, or I should never have engaged myself. A "fit-up" is only one grade higher than a booth, which latter branch of the profession, by the way, I have always regretted never having explored. I missed the most picturesque and romantic portion of the theatrical world by not penetrating into that time-forsaken corner. Booth life is a Bohemia within a Bohemia. So far as social and artistic position is concerned, it is at the bottom of the dramatic ladder ; but for interest and adventure, it stands at the very top.

However, I never did join a booth, so there is an end of the matter. The nearest I approached to anything of the kind was this fit-up, and that I didn't like at all. We kept to the very small towns,

where there was no theatre, and fitted up an apology for a stage in any hall or room we could hire for the purpose. The town-hall was what we generally tried for, but we were not too particular ; any large room did, and we would even put up with a conveniently situated barn. We carried our own props, scenery, and proscenium, and trusted for the wood-work to some local carpenter. A row of candles did duty for footlights, and a piano, hired in the town, represented the orchestra. We couldn't get a piano on one occasion, so the proprietor of the hall lent us his harmonium.

I will not linger over my experiences with this company ; they were not pleasant ones. Short extracts from two letters, one written just after joining, and the other sent off just before I left, will be sufficient :—

“ DEAR JIM,—I find I've dropped the substance and grasped the shadow (I pride myself not so much on the originality of this remark as on its applicability). I shall leave as soon as possible, and try my luck in London. My ambition to play Juvenile Lead vanished the moment I saw the Leading Lady, who is, as usual, the manager's wife.

She is a fat, greasy old woman. She has dirty hands and finger nails, and perspires freely during the course of the performance. She is about three times my size, and if the audiences to which we play have the slightest sense of humour—which, from what I have seen of them, I think extremely doubtful—our love-making must be a rare treat to them. How a London first-night gallery would enjoy it ! I'm afraid, though, it's only wasted down here. My arm, when I try to clasp her waist, reaches to about the middle of her back ; and, when we embrace, the house can't see me at all. I have to carry her half-way across the stage in one part. By Jove ! I'm glad we don't play that piece often.

“ She says I shall never make a good ‘lover’ unless I throw more ardour (*‘harder,’* she calls it) into my acting. . . .”

“ . . . Shall be with you on Monday next. Can't stand this any longer. It's ruining me. Seven-and-six was all I could get last week, and eleven shillings the week before. We are not doing bad business by any means. Indeed, we have very good houses. The old man has got the knack of

making out good gag bills, and that pulls 'em in for the two or three nights we stay at each place. You know what I mean by a 'gag' bill :—'The Ruined Mill by Dead Man's Pool. Grace Mervin thinks to meet a friend, but finds a foe. Harry Baddun recalls old days. "Why do you not love me?" "Because you are a bad man." "Then die!" The struggle on the brink!! "Help!!" "There is none to help you here." "You lie, Harry Baddun; *I* am here." A hand from the grave!! Harry Baddun meets his doom!!!'

"That's what I mean by a gag bill.

"Whatever money is made, however, he takes care to keep for himself. He can always put up at the best hotel in the place, while we have to pawn our things to pay for the meanest of lodgings.

"It isn't only actors who get robbed by these managers : authors also suffer pretty considerably. We have two copyright pieces in our list, both of which draw very well, but not a penny is paid for performing them. To avoid any chance of unpleasantness, the titles of the pieces and the names of the chief characters are altered. So that even if the author or his friends (supposing it possible for an author to have any friends) were on the look-

out, they would never know anything about it. And, if they did, it would be of no use. It would be throwing good money after bad to attempt to enforce payment from the men who do this sort of thing,—and I hear that it is done all over the provinces,—they have no money, and none can be got out of them. Your penniless man can comfortably defy half the laws in the statute book.

“What a nuisance firearms are on the stage! I thought I was blinded the other night, and my eyes are painful even now. The fellow should have fired up in the air. It is the only safe rule on a small stage, though it does look highly ridiculous to see a man drop down dead because another man fires a pistol at the moon. But there is always some mishap with them. They either don't go off at all, or else they go off in the wrong place, and, when they do go off, there is generally an accident. They can never be depended upon. You rush on to the stage, present a pistol at somebody's head, and say, ‘Die!’ but the pistol only goes click, and the man doesn't know whether to die or not. He waits while you have another try at him, and the thing clicks again; and then you find out that the property man hasn't put a cap on it, and you turn

round to get one. But the other man, thinking it is all over, makes up his mind to die at once from nothing else but fright, and, when you come back to kill him for the last time, you find he's already dead.

"We have recourse to some rum makeshifts here, to eke out our wardrobes. My old frock coat, with a little cloth cape which one of the girls has cut out for me pinned on underneath the collar, and with a bit of lace round the cuffs, does for the gallant of half the old comedies ; and, when I pin the front corners back and cover them with red calico, I'm a French soldier. A pair of white thingumies does admirably for buckskin riding breeches, and, for the part of a Spanish conspirator, I generally borrow my landlady's tablecloth. . . ."

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It was about the end of October when I found myself once more in London. The first thing I then did was to go to my old shop on the Surrey-side. Another company and another manager were there, but the latter knew me, and, as I owned a dress suit, engaged me at a salary of twelve shillings weekly to play the part of a swell.

When I had been there just one week, he closed. Whether it was paying me that twelve shillings that broke him I cannot say; but on Monday morning some men came and cut the gas off, and then he said he shouldn't go on any longer, and that we must all do the best we could for ourselves.

I, with two or three others, thereupon started off for a theatre at the East End, which was about to be opened for a limited number of nights by some great world-renowned actor. This was about the fortieth world-renowned party I had heard of for the first time within the last twelve-month. My education in the matter of world-renowned people had evidently been shamefully neglected.

The theatre was cunningly contrived, so that one had to pass through the bar of the adjoining public-house—to the landlord of which it belonged—to get to the stage. Our little party was saved from temptation, however, for I don't think we could have mustered a shilling amongst the lot of us that morning. I was getting most seriously hard up at this time. The few pounds I had had left, after purchasing my wardrobe and paying

my railway fares, etc., had now dwindled down to shillings, and unless things mended, I felt I should have to throw up the sponge and retire from the stage. I was determined not to do this though, till the very last, for I dreaded the chorus of "I told you so's," and "I knew very well how 'twould be's," and such like well-known and exasperating crows of triumph, with which, in these cases, our delighted friends glorify themselves and crush us.

The East End theatre proved a stop-gap for a while. I was fortunate enough to be one of those engaged out of the crowd of eager and anxious applicants, among whom I met a couple from the fit-up company I had lately left, they having come to the same conclusion as myself, viz., that it was impossible to live well and "dress respectably on and off the stage" upon an average salary of ten shillings weekly. The engagement was only for a fortnight, and there is only one incident connected with it that I particularly remember. That was my being "guyed" on one occasion. We were playing a melodrama, the scene of which was laid in some outlandish place or other, and the stage manager insisted on my wearing a most outrageous costume. I knew it would be laughed

at, especially in that neighbourhood, and my expectations were more than fulfilled. I hadn't been on the stage five seconds before I heard a voice from the gallery hoarsely inquire: "What is it, Bill?" And then another voice added: "Tell us what it is, and you shall have it."

A good deal of laughter followed these speeches. I got hot all over, and felt exceedingly uncomfortable and nervous. It was as much as I could do to recollect my part, and it was with a great effort that I began my first line. No sooner had I opened my mouth, however, than somebody in the pit exclaimed, in tones of the utmost surprise, "Blowed if it ain't alive!"

After that, the remarks on my personal appearance fell thick and fast: "Look well in a shop window, that bloke!" "Nice suit to take your gal out on a Sunday in!" "This style, thirty shillin's," etc.; while one good-natured man sought to put me at ease by roaring out in a stentorian voice, "Never you mind, old man; you go on. They're jealous 'cos you've got nice clothes on." How I managed to get through the part I don't know. I became more nervous and awkward every minute, and, of course, the more I bungled, the more the

house jeered. I gained a good deal of sympathy behind, for most of them had had similar experiences of their own; but I was most intensely miserable all that evening, and, for the next night or two, quite dreaded to face the audience. Making game of any one is a very amusing occupation, but the "game" doesn't see the fun till a long while afterwards. I can't bear to hear any of the performers chaffed when I'm at a theatre. Actors are necessarily a sensitive class of people, and I don't think those who make fun of them, when any little thing goes wrong, have any idea of the pain they are inflicting. It is quite right, and quite necessary sometimes, that disapprobation should be expressed, and that unmistakably, but it should be for the purpose of correcting real faults. "Guying" is, as a rule, indulged in only by the silliest portion of the audience, and for no other object but to display their own vulgar wit.

After my fortnight at the East End, I went as one of the chorus in a new opera-bouffe to be brought out at a West End theatre. We rehearsed for three weeks, the piece ran for one, and then I again took a provincial engagement, which, as it

was now close upon Christmas, was easy enough to obtain.

My stay in London had not been very profitable to me, but it had given my friends a treat, as they had been able to come and see me act again. At least, I suppose it was a treat to them, though they did not say so. My friends are always most careful never to overdo the thing in the matter of praise. I cannot accuse them of sycophancy. They scorn to say pleasant things that they don't mean. They prefer saying unpleasant things that they do mean. There's no humbug about them; they never hesitate to tell me just exactly what they think of me. That is good of them. I respect them for saying what they think; but if they would think a little differently, I should respect them still more. I wonder if everybody's friends are as conscientious? I've heard of people having "admiring friends," and "flattering friends," and "over-indulgent friends," but I've never had any of that sort myself. I've often thought I should rather like to, though, and if any gentleman has more friends of that kind than he wants, and would care to have a few of the opposite stamp, I am quite ready to swop with him. I can

warrant mine never to admire or flatter under any circumstances whatsoever; neither will he find them over-indulgent. To a man who really wishes to be told of his faults, they would be invaluable; on this point they are candour itself. A conceited man would also derive much benefit from their society. I have myself.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY LAST APPEARANCE

I LEFT London exactly twelve months from the day on which I had started to fulfil my first provincial engagement, and I did not return to it again while I was an actor. I left it with my baggage early in the morning by the newspaper express from Euston; I returned to it late at night, footsore and hungry, and with no other possessions than the clothes I stood upright in.

Of the last few months of my professional life, the following brief extracts will speak. A slightly bitter tone runs through some of them, but at the time they were written I was suffering great disappointment, and everything was going wrong with me—circumstances under which a man is perhaps apt to look upon his surroundings through smoke-coloured glasses.

Three weeks after Christmas I write:—

“ . . . Business good and money regular. Business is almost always good, though, at pantomime time: the test will come later on, when we begin to travel. How a provincial audience does love a pantomime! and how I do hate it! I can't say I think very highly of provincial audiences. They need a lot of education in art. They roar over coarse buffoonery, and applaud noisy rant to the echo. One might as well go to Billingsgate to study English as to the provinces to learn acting.

“I played First Low Comedy on Saturday night at half an hour's notice, the real First Low Comedy being hopelessly intoxicated at the time. It's a pity, amidst all the talk about the elevation of the stage, that the elevation of actors is not a less frequent occurrence. It can hardly improve the reputation of the profession in the eyes of the public, when they take up the *Era* and read advertisement after advertisement, ending with such lines as, 'None but sober people need apply.' 'Must contrive to keep sober, at all events during the performance.' 'People who are constantly getting drunk need not write.' I've known some idiots actually make themselves half tipsy on pur-

pose before coming on the stage, evidently thinking, because they can't act when they've got all their few wits about them, that they'll manage better if they get rid of them altogether. There is a host of wonderful traditions floating about the theatrical world of this, that, and the other great actor having always played this, that, and the other part while drunk; and so, when some wretched little actor has to take one of these parts, he, fired by a noble determination to follow in the footsteps of his famous predecessor, gets drunk too.

“Bad language is another thing that the profession might spare a lot of, and still have enough remaining for all ordinary purposes. I remember one night at —— we all agreed to fine ourselves a penny each time we swore. We gave it up after two hours' trial: none of us had any money left. . . .

Six weeks later:—

“ . . . Business gets worse instead of better. Our manager has behaved very well indeed. He paid us our salaries right up to the end of last

week, though any one could see he was losing money every night ; and then on Saturday, after treasury, he called us all together, and put the case frankly. He said he could not continue as he had been doing, but that, if we liked, he was ready to keep on with us for a week or two longer upon sharing terms, to see if the luck turned. We agreed to do this, and so formed ourselves into what is called a 'commonwealth'—though common poverty would be a more correct term in my opinion, for the shares each night, after deducting expenses, have been about eighteen-pence. The manager takes three of these shares (one for being manager, one for acting, and the other one to make up the three), and the rest of us have one each. I'm getting awfully hard up, though I live for a week, now, on less than what I've often given for a dinner. . . ."

A week later, this company broke up, and I then joined another that was close handy at the time. It is from this latter that the following is written :—

" . . . I just manage to keep my head

above water, and that is all. If things get worse, I shall be done for. I've no money of my own left now.

“A very sad thing happened here last week. Our leading man died suddenly from heart disease, leaving his wife and two children totally destitute. If he had been a big London actor, for half his life in receipt of a salary of, say, three thousand a year, the theatrical press would have teemed with piteous appeals to the public, all his friends would have written to the papers generously offering to receive subscriptions on his behalf, and all the theatres would have given performances at double prices to help pay his debts and funeral expenses. As, however, he had never earned anything higher than about two pounds a week, Charity could hardly be expected to interest herself about the case; and so the wife supports herself and her children by taking in washing. Not that I believe she would ask for alms, even were there any chance of her getting them, for, when the idea was only suggested to her, she quite fired up, and talked some absurd nonsense, about having too much respect for her husband's profession to degrade it into a mere excuse for begging. . . .”

This company also went wrong. It was a terrible year for theatres. Trade was bad everywhere, and "amusements" was the very first item that people with diminishing incomes struck out of the list of their expenditure. One by one I parted with every valuable I had about me, and a visit to the pawnshop, just before leaving each town, became as essential as packing. I went through the country like a distressed ship through troubled waters, marking my track by the riches I cast overboard to save myself. My watch I left behind me in one town, my chain in another; a ring here, my dress suit there; a writing-case I dropped at this place, and a pencil-case at that. And so things went on—or rather, off—till the beginning of May, when this letter, the last of the series, was written :—

"DEAR JIM,—Hurrah! I've struck oil at last. I think it was time I did after what I've gone through. I was afraid the profession would have to do without me, but it's all safe now. I'm in a new company—joined last Saturday, and we're doing splendidly. Manager is a magnificent fellow, and a good man of business. He understands how

to make the donkey go. He advertises and bills right and left, spares no expense, and does the thing thoroughly well. He's a jolly nice fellow, too, and evidently a man of intelligence, for he appreciates me. He engaged me without my applying to him at all, after seeing me act one night last week, when he was getting his company together. I play First Walking Gent. at thirty-five shillings a week. He has been a captain in the army, and is a thorough gentleman. He never bullies or interferes, and everybody likes him. He is going all round the North of England, taking all the big Lancashire and Yorkshire towns, and then going to bring us to London for the winter. He wants me to sign an agreement for one year certain at two pounds five. I haven't appeared to be too anxious. It's always best to hang back a bit in such cases, so I told him I would think it over; but of course I shall accept. Can't write any more now. I'm just off to dine with him. We stop here three weeks, and then go to ——. Very comfortable lodgings. Yours, ——."

That was written on Tuesday. On Saturday, we came to the theatre at twelve for treasury. The

Captain was not there. He had gone that morning to pay a visit to Sir somebody or other, one of the neighbouring gentry, who was a great friend of his, and he had not yet returned. He would be back by the evening—so the courteous acting manager assured us—and treasury would take place after the performance.

So in the evening, when the performance was over, we all assembled on the stage and waited. We waited about ten minutes, and then our Heavy Man, who had gone across the way to get a glass before they shut up, came back with a scared face to say that he'd just seen the booking-clerk from the station, who had told him that the "Captain" had left for London by an early train that morning. And no sooner had the Heavy Man made this announcement, than it occurred to the call-boy that he had seen the courteous acting manager leave the theatre immediately after the play had begun, carrying a small black bag.

I went back to the dressing-room, gathered my things into a bundle, and came down again with it. The others were standing about the stage, talking low, with a weary, listless air. I passed through them without a word, and reached the stage-door.

It was one of those doors that shut with a spring. I pulled it open, and held it back with my foot, while I stood there on the threshold for a moment, looking out at the night. Then I turned my coat collar up, and stepped into the street: the stage-door closed behind me with a bang and a click, and I have never opened another one since.

Jerome, Jerome K.,

Stage-Land and On the stage - and off

Leipzig 1891

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